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p9



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WELCOME

We're heading toward the biggest Christmas ever for Blu-ray. If you've not yet been bitten by the hi-def disc bug then I predict that you'll succumb this Winter. A fleet of bargain-priced players are sailing into the high-street, and the tech has never been better. To whet your appetite **we round up new models from four of the biggest brands around** (p82), as well as go in-depth with one of the most exciting high-performance alternatives available via the internet, the universal Oppo BDP-831 (p70). We also sneak behind the scenes for a natter with Hollywood majors Fox (p12) and Sony (p34) about their innovative plans for Blu-ray discs. I was recently lucky enough to travel to Hollywood for briefing sessions with superstar directors Baz Luhrmann and Gavin Hood, and was amazed by the enthusiasm these guys have for the HD format.

Elsewhere, we crank Pioneer's SC-LX82 receiver up to eleven (p58), get wowed by LG's best 42in screen yet (p72), and recap the stories that rocked this year's IFA Tech Expo (p26).

Enjoy the show!

Steve May

TEAM HCC

Steve May:
The UK's most experienced AV Editor with 20+ years as a CE journo on his clock



Anton van Beek:
News Ed Anton began his pro-videophile career over a decade ago



Mark Craven:
HCC's Production Editor can write shorthand – he can't read it, though



Rik Henderson:
HCC's Dep Ed is an AV and videogames nut – and former TV presenter



Chris Jenkins:
Our ISF-calibrated Tech Labs manager is the former Editor of Total DVD mag



John Rook:
Art Editor John first worked on HCC back in 1999, when TVs were made of wood



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SONY:
'We've
invented
Blu-ray's
killer app'
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Looking for a Blu-ray player?
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decks through their paces in
the HCC Test Labs (p83)...

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Philips BDP7300
Sharp BD-HP22
SonyBDP-S360



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COVER
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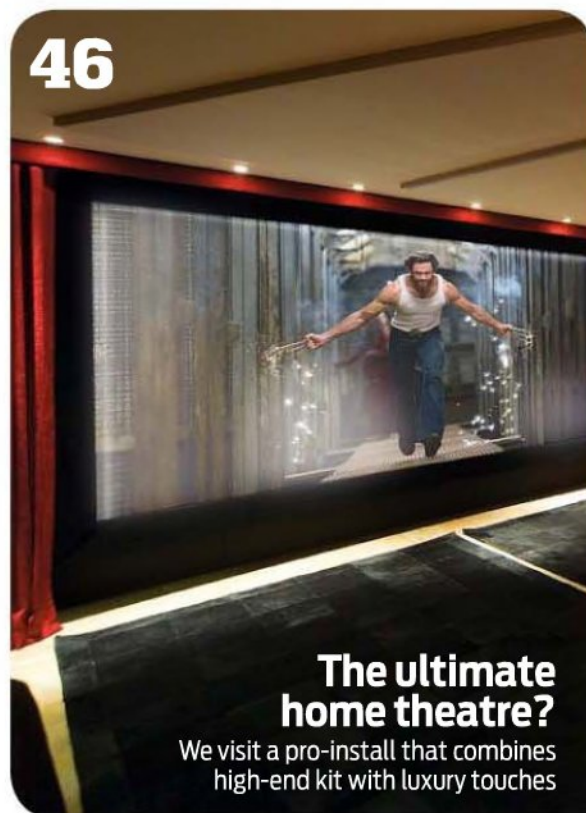
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Another HCC reader shares the secrets
behind his AV setup



A touch of class

Toshiba re-invents the 'mobile internet network
device' with its feature-rich Journe Touch



The ultimate home theatre?

We visit a pro-install that combines
high-end kit with luxury touches

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the best-possible advice when it comes
to planning your next purchase



CO-STARRING

This issue's team of expert writers are the best qualified in the business

Martin Pipe:
Technology specialist
Martin co-developed HCC's
Tech Lab operation



Richard Stevenson:
Industry veteran and former
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journal ERT



Barry Fox:
A veteran commentator on
consumer electronics in
mags like New Scientist



Jim Hill:
Apple fanatic Hill is the
former editor of T3 Home
and a What Hi-Fi escapee



Jon Thompson:
Post-production specialist
whose credits include
Casino Royale and Kill Bill



John Archer:
The UK's most experienced
TV tester cut his teeth as an
early HCC staffer





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I Sell the Dead (BD)

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102 Rome: The Complete Collection (BD)

103 Braveheart: XV Anniversary (BD)

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Shaun of the Dead (BD)

Hot Fuzz (BD)

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The Avengers: The Complete Series 2 (DVD)

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A portable solution for those looking to project digital snaps and movies from cameras, PMPs, iPods and USB devices

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80 Compro VideoMate Network Media Center T1000W

Compro brings a much-needed touch of style to the otherwise functional world of media streamers

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The ultimate guide to the UK's best AV gear. Peruse then choose!

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Onkyo's feature-packed successor to its best-selling TX-NR706 AVR is here



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STUDIOS TUNED'
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BDP-LX91
REFERENCE 'AIR STUDIOS
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BULLETIN

→ **News highlights** **HDMI STORM BREWING** Deep Colour compatibility warning
POWER HUNGRY Denon launches 9.3-channel AVR **SEE-THRU SATELLITES** More 'invisible' speakers from Ferguson Hill **BOSE REBORN** Audio brand goes wireless **HAMMER GLAMOUR** The only coffee table book you'll ever want **DEMO'D** One-stop guide to the best bits of *Crank 2: High Voltage*



A touch of class

Toshiba Journe Touch → www.toshiba.co.uk

Toshiba's Journe Touch is a multimedia internet tablet designed for use around the home. Due to hit the UK soon, priced around £300, its specs include an LED-backlit 7in touchscreen, 1GB internal memory, WinCE 6.0 Pro operating system and 802.11b/g wireless support. Toshiba claims that the device can be used for everything 'from web browsing and IP radio to imaging viewing and high-def video playback'. Could this be the must-have gadget of 2010?

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Partner with...

Sharp Aquos LB 1085

Super-sized LCD TV

£100,000 approx

If you want a TV that will really impress family and friends, you could do much worse than Sharp's new 108in Full HD LCD TV. And don't worry if your friends are eco-warriors – whilst this gargantuan bigscreen lets you soak in HD content on the grandest scale possible, it actually consumes four times less power than one of the brand's 52in models!

www.sharp.co.uk



Sound of style

Ferguson Hill FH009 Home Theatre System
www.fergusonhill.co.uk

Innovative Brit loudspeaker specialist Ferguson Hill has added a new 2.1 system to its range of striking see-thru speakers. Priced around £800 and due for release early next year, the eye-catching FH009 Home Theatre System mixes two wall- or stand-mountable horn speakers with an integrated 128W amp/subwoofer. The latter features a USB input and a 3.5mm jack so you can hook up your iPod or other media player.

KEF gets barred



KEF is the latest audio brand to take the plunge into the soundbar market with a system

it claims represents 'a perfect combination of outstanding audio performance and stylish good looks'. Priced around £1,100, the company's KHT8005 home theatre system features the HTF8003 three-channel soundbar and 200W KUBE-2 subwoofer, but adds in two compact HTS7001 satellite speakers for the rears – and thus ensures a genuine 5.1 audio experience.

Flagship AVR



Denon is to release its most advanced home cinema receiver to date in the form of the

AVR-4810. Available in a choice of premium silver and black finishes, and priced around £2,800, this network-streaming, Wi-Fi-enabled 9.3-channel AVR has a rated output of 180W per-channel and offers 1080p upscaling via an Anchor Bay VRS processor. It also packs Audyssey DSX setup through 11.3 channels to deliver additional front height and/or front width audio.

Stijl council



We're constantly hearing about manufacturers adding a touch of style to their new ranges of kit, but

how about speakers with a touch of De Stijl? This early 20th Century Dutch design movement (led by artist Piet Mondrian) employed geometric abstraction and colours and is now being paid homage to by German loudspeaker manufacturer Elac, with a limited edition of its 2.5-way bass reflex FS 247 floorstander in 'De Stijl dress'. Pricing and availability have yet to be announced.

2D Blu-ray for Avatar first?

Sci-fi blockbuster unlikely to lead the charge of home 3D

James Cameron's *Avatar*, the most heavily-hyped 3D movie ever, and the film upon which Panasonic is basing its 3D Blu-ray and TV launch plans for 2010, looks likely to debut on Blu-ray in standard 2D format. In fact, the number of big movie titles to embrace the new 3D format during 2010 is shaping up to be limited at best.

During an exclusive technology briefing at Fox Studios in LA, chief technologist Danny Kaye downplayed *Avatar*'s anticipated 3D debut, telling HCC: 'As we sit here, there's no 3D format yet. That's something that will come. Suffice it to say, that's something we're pretty excited about. However, do not make the assumption that *Avatar* will be the first 3D Blu-ray from Fox.'

The standard Fox window from theatrical to disc is four months. This puts *Avatar* on schedule for a launch in April 2010. With Panasonic's first 3D Blu-ray player and TV range unlikely to start shipping until early Summer, given that the format is only due to be finalised in December, this puts the blockbuster out of sync with any initial hardware rollout. A far better bet would seem to be Fox's other 3D blockbuster *Ice Age 3D*. A 2D version debuts on Blu-ray in November, leaving a respectable gap (and plenty of product development time) for an *Ice Age 3D* disc to be released alongside any hardware introductions in 2010. It seems reasonable to assume



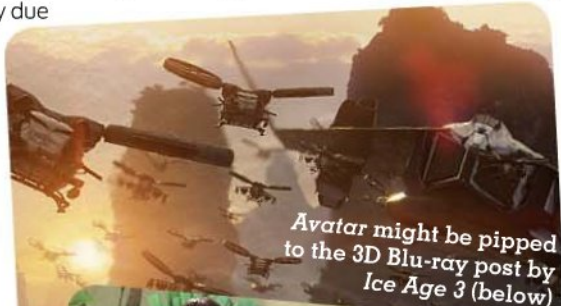
'Do not make the assumption that *Avatar* will be the first 3D Blu-ray,' says Fox Home Entertainment's Danny Kaye

that *Avatar* will follow the same double-dip path, with a 3D Special Edition released after the standard 2D release.

Don't expect 3D movies to ship with free 3D glasses either, as has been the practice with anaglyph movie releases. Fox's Danny Kaye says it's down to cost. 'I'm guessing that the TV manufacturers are going to put glasses in the box, as well as bundle the new 3D BD players with glasses. 3D glasses don't cost 50 cents or a dollar each. Eighteen months ago a pair for the home would cost well over \$100 – today they're around \$25.' But he doesn't think this will limit the availability of 3D eyewear. 'You're going to

see designer companies getting involved, making cool-looking, comfortable glasses. I've seen styles that can be worn by people that already wear glasses, because the nose bridge moves. You'll be able to buy glasses for a six-year old or a 40-year old. Everyone intends to give consumers easy access.'

Michael Lewis, of 3D innovators RealD, has even suggested that prescription 3D specs are likely to be introduced at some point in the near future.



Avatar might be pipped to the 3D Blu-ray post by Ice Age 3 (below)



Playlist...

Team HCC reveals its Playback picks of the last month

1 Ink: Alter Egos Exposed (Sky Arts)



With contributions from A-list creators, this terrific documentary series about comic books is a must-see for fans of superhero movies and graphic novels alike. *Steve May*

2 Resident Evil: Extinction (Region B BD)

I've gotten into zombies again after reading *The Walking Dead* comics, so I'm loving this action franchise all over again! *Rik Henderson*



3 Body of Lies (All-region BD)



Entertaining, edgy 'War on Terror' thriller from Ridley Scott, with Leonardo DiCaprio doing the water-boarding. *Mark Craven*

4 Veronica Mars (E4)



Channel 4's digital offshoot finally does something good, screening all three seasons of this witty, geek-literate detective series back-to-back. *Anton van Beek*

5 Futurama (Sky One)



Space golf, robots and one-eyed girls – fantastic fun. Looks galactic in HD, too. *John Rook*

Demo'd!

The AV highlights of...
Crank 2: High Voltage
on Blu-ray

Jump start



09.41: Chev Chelios (Jason Statham) tries to jump start his artificial heart by jacking a car and hot-wiring his pump. He smashes the window, unleashing a ripple around the soundstage of fizzing electrics, car noises and bubbling J-pop on the car stereo.

Social Club chaos



15.00: Chev clears out the Social Club: bodies fly through windows and walls, before a bicycle is put to surprising use by 'Whitney Houston.' Watch for the HD camera wobble as a hood lands perilously close to the lens...

Stripping Eve



20.48: Grinding pole-dance rock reintroduces Chev's beau Eve in eye-popping style (eat your heart out Megan Fox), giving way seconds latter to a cleavage-deflating gun battle. You'll want to duck as spent shells clatter to the floor and the LFE rumbles.

Enter Chevzilla



60.00: As the movie moves to its outrageous climax, you're treated to this tribute to Toho monster movies: Slow-mo grappling, a blizzard of electrical sound effects and tiny figures watching aghast...

Bose cuts the wires

Designer hi-fi brand unveils audio streaming solution

American audio giant Bose has set its sights on the media streaming market, and believes a design-led approach to the technology could make the concept a lot more accessible.

The company enters the field of media streaming with its SoundLink unit (£490), notable for giving the concept a welcome air of simplicity. As Bose PR & Communications Manager Martin Bass told *HCC*: 'To have all the technology that a customer wants, or more importantly needs, is all very well, but if it can't be used then it's useless.' Indeed, most often, streaming any type of audio file over a home network (be it wireless or wired) is the domain of the computer-literate, at least during the initial set-up. Bose has created a system that is much more plug and play.

The USB dongle that comes with the package contains stealth software that, after automatic installation, finds and prepares your music content without you having to press a single button. It works seamlessly with iTunes (and online music resource Spotify) but could technically work with any music library and internet radio software. In addition, the gizmo unfurls into a wireless mast, ready to link with the portable SoundLink without relying on an internal or external modem, or even a wireless router.

Impressive soundscape

The audio unit itself is capable of providing a impressive soundscape that belies its diminutive size. And, as it comes with a rechargeable lithium-ion battery (which lasts around approximately 10 hours in normal listening conditions), it can be carried to any room in the house within 60 feet of the dongle.



'If it can't be used then it's useless', says Bose's Martin Bass

Bose has also updated its Cinemate home cinema system range. Priced around £750 and £550 respectively, the Cinemate

GS and Cinemate both offer a virtual surround experience from a 2.1 setup, and are driven by Bose's proprietary Acoustimass audio module. The major difference between them is that the GS features two premium-range Gemstone satellites and a universal remote.

The company has also entered the high-end iPod dock market with its £700 SoundDock 10. Genuine iPod connoisseurs are willing to pay top dollar for premium audio quality and this has not gone unnoticed: 'The idea of so many people investing time and indeed money in putting together a library of musical content onto their iPod is why we feel people desire better-quality equipment to play it,' explains Bass.

No strings: The SoundLink is truly portable



Under the influence



Boozy box office smash *The Hangover* will hit DVD and Blu-ray in the UK on December 7. As is

becoming more and more common, the former looks a tad patchy, serving up the theatrical cut of the film, plus a *Map of Destruction* feature, a musical improv scene and a gag reel. The BD is a much more impressive affair, promising all of the DVD content, plus an extended cut, a picture-in-picture commentary, BD-Live access, a digital copy and more.

Jurassic larks



Fans of Will Ferrell and bigscreen remakes of obscure '70s TV shows will be in heaven on

November 23 when Universal unleashes *Land of the Lost* on DVD and BD in the UK. This FX-packed comedy sees Ferrell's scientist and two colleagues (played by Anna Friel and Danny McBride) sucked into an alternate universe populated by dinosaurs and other creatures. BD-exclusive extras include an 83-minute *Making of...* and an interview with the show's creators Sid and Marty Krofft.

Maximum Potter



Warner Home Video is waving its magic wand this Christmas and conjuring up the sixth Harry Potter

film on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK. Confirmed extras for the Dec 7 release of *...The Half-Blood Prince*, include featurettes on the cast and crew, additional scenes, a sneak peek at Universal's new theme park ride and a look at the life of author JK Rowling. Meanwhile the BD platter will benefit from Warner's fancy new Maximum Movie Mode with input from the film's stars, director and producers.

It's a good time to be a fan of Hammer, the iconic British film studio. Firstly, the studio's numerous sexy sirens and distressed damsels have been honoured in a coffee table tome entitled *Hammer Glamour*. Available now for £25 from Titan Books, this full-colour tribute to Hammer's leading ladies is packed with interviews and rare and unpublished photos.

And if that's not enough, London's Idea Generation Gallery is having a Hammer House of Horror Festival. Running from October 27 to November 15, it includes an exhibition of original posters and behind-the-scenes photos, plus movie screenings, ghost tours and more!



It's Hammer time!

Hammer Glamour → Titan Books



Glamour ghouls:
The Collinson twins (top);
Hazel Court (middle);
Martine Beswick (bottom)

Pick'n'mix



British movie star Tamer Hassan picks his five favourite films

1 The Business

'If you haven't seen this yet – you should have. And I'm in it!'

2 Raging Bull

'De Niro is the boss, and this film is a classic.'

3 Once Upon A time in America

'Everything about this, from the score, to the script and the sets, is perfect. And it's De Niro again.'

4 Rainman

'A change of pace, this one, but still a remarkable film with blindin' performances.'

5 The Usual Suspects

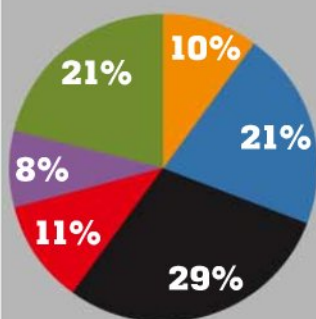
'Cos Keyser Soze is a 'king Turk, just like me.'

Tamer Hassan stars in *City Rats*, out now on DVD/Blu-ray courtesy of Reolver. He's also soon to appear on UK cinema screens in *Dead Man Running*, alongside Danny Dyer and Curtis '50 Cent' Jackson.

We asked...

Which of the following brands has been the most innovative over the past 12 months?

- Sony
- Panasonic
- Samsung
- Philips
- LG
- None of them, it's been a dull year for new tech



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Wolverine sharpens Blu-ray

BD-Live has mutated into something useful, says Fox tech chief

The boffins behind Fox's Blu-ray smash *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* believe they have finally cracked the conundrum known as BD-Live. The interactive element of the Blu-ray format has long bedeviled studios looking for killer applications for the tech, but according to Fox Home Entertainment's Senior Vice President Content Development Mike Mulvihill, BD's interactive content is finally coming of age.

Mulvihill told HCC: 'We want to treat Blu-ray not so much as a format as a creative medium. And, by leveraging the creativity of our filmmakers in collaboration with some of the best producers, it's something we can do. Our work with *XMO: Wolverine*, which for the first time features Live Lookup, and the upcoming 10th Anniversary release of *Fight Club*, which offers fans the ability to deconstruct the award-winning sound mix of the movie, are a good demonstration of that. We want to leverage interactivity in an appropriate way.'

Live Lookup, in particular, seems likely to become a regular on Fox's A-List movie titles, and uses a player's BD-Live connection to deliver regularly updated filmographies. 'The filmog has long been a popular feature of DVDs,' explains Mulvihill, 'but if you have a disc from 1998, the filmog will only show you what a star did until that time. There's 11 years of history which isn't represented, because the disc is static. On *Wolverine* the filmographies update every time the disc is loaded.'



Blu-ray is a creative medium not a format, according to Fox's Mike Mulvihill

With Live Lookup you can explore any actor's profile, which aggregates all the categories relevant to that actor, be they producer credits or other starring roles. Fox even allows you to navigate the feature in a couple of ways: Actors in a Chapter, which gives a list of all the actors which appear in a particular chapter of the movie, or All Actors in the film. 'A camera icon even highlights all the actors in any given scene.'

Live Lookup is executed through a partnership with the Internet Movie Database, but not all IMDB material is available – it's only focused on those who have screen time. 'We thought that was the best way to introduce the feature,' explains Mulvihill. However, Fox's new BD-Live tech has some stiff competition in the form of Sony Pictures' similar MovieQ functionality (for more turn to p34).

Of course, not all of Fox's next generation BD-Live features are aimed at hardcore film fans. Mulvihill reveals that the upcoming *Ice Age 3* release sports an interactive storybook mode, letting youngsters select images from the film, combine them with text, and create storybooks to save or share.

Look and learn:
Live Lookup uses data from the IMDB



Affordable Arcam



Arcam is launching a stripped-down version of its flagship AVR600 receiver. The new AVR500

maintains the build quality and audio processing of its predecessor but drops some functionality – including the network card for internet radio, streaming and IP control capability, along with some legacy video and audio outputs and multiroom connections.

The AVR500 is expected to retail for around £2,500, and will 'set new standards for audio quality in its price range', claims Arcam.

BenQ brings projection home



BenQ has announced three single-chip DLP projectors for the home entertainment market. The W6000 is a 1080p model with HQV processing, ISF calibration, 50,000:1 contrast ratio and horizontal and vertical lens shift, costing £2,500. The W1000 (£1,000, also 1080p), features a six-segment colour wheel, BrilliantColor processing and a 2,700:1 contrast ratio. Finally, the £500 W600 is a 720p model aimed at 'content-conscious home entertainment fans'.

Tis witchcraft!



Fed up of pressing buttons on your remote control? Wished you could just wave a wand and magically control your kit? Well, The Wand Company Ltd's Real Magic Wand might be what you're looking for. Available from www.firebox.com, priced around £50, this innovative gesture-based controller has been modelled to look like a magic wand and can learn up to 10 infrared codes from other remotes, with button controls being assigned to specific gestures (such as rotating clockwise to turn up the volume). Cool!

This month's top ten news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 21:9 on the go

While we wait for another TV manufacturer to try its hand at a 21:9 TV, LG has released a mobile phone with a full cinematic screen. With its hi-res 800 x 345 resolution 21:9 VGA screen, LG's super-thin Chocolate BL40 is clearly an ideal option for those cinephiles who like watching Cinemascope movies on their mobile. So is it a PMP or a phone?

2 Cell TV is a reality

Toshiba has confirmed that its long-awaited 'Cell Regza' LED TV will hit the Japanese market this December. Coming complete with a 64bit Cell processor, this futuristic TV houses a resolution three times greater than 1080p Full HD (3840 x 2160) and will come equipped with an integrated Blu-ray player and 1TB PVR, making it easily the most advanced telly available. Can we have ours now please?

3 Olympic vision

BBC bigwig Roger Mosley has teased that the 2012 London Olympics could be the first to be shot and broadcast in 3D. Said Mosley at the Amsterdam IBC broadcasting expo: 'No one would expect the games in 2012 to be comprehensively in 3D, but it would be a shame not to have any 3D footage of London in its Olympic state'. Colour us rather excited.

4 Bigger Blu-rays?

Could 100GB Blu-ray discs be on the horizon? Quite possibly, as Sharp recently announced that it has perfected a 500mW blue-violet semiconductor laser that is capable of writing four-layer Blu-rays at 8x speed – exactly what is needed to write to 100GB discs...

5 Rental woes

Remember when we used to rent videos and DVDs from actual stores instead of using online rental sites? No, neither does Blockbuster. The traditional rental chain has suffered as preferences have changed, and



Eclectic mix

recently announced closure of 960 US stores. The company is fighting back, however, with rental kiosks, planning to go from 500 to 10,000 operating across the Atlantic by the end of 2010.

6 Laser boy

Forget LED and OLED, the future of TV is all about lasers – or at least that's the message coming from US start-up HDI, which recently demo'd a prototype 100in 3D Laser-TV. HDI has crafted a module that contains a red, green and blue laser, ensuring richer colour reproduction. The lasers are also said to be cheap to produce and use just 1W each to run.

7 HD DVD returns!

The decaying corpse of HD DVD is clawing its way out of its coffin, with news that independent label Anthem Films will be bringing the lo-fi zombie shocker *Deadlands 2: Trapped* to the defunct hi-def format. Scheduled for a US release on 27 October, the HD DVD edition will be limited to a run of just 500 copies, each including a numbered certificate of authenticity. Geek-tastic!

8 Disney talks 3D BD

Walt Disney exec Gordon Ho has revealed that the House of Mouse intends to release its first Full HD 3D Blu-ray titles

'as soon as possible, as soon as the [Christmas] holidays 2010', to tie-in with the first compatible TVs and BD decks. Probable titles include *Tim Burton's Alice in Wonderland* and *Toy Story 3*.

9 Blacker, better LCDs

The TV whizzkids at Sharp reckon they've managed to boost LCD contrast ratios by 60 per cent. At a press conference in Tokyo, the CE giant unveiled a new process dubbed UV²A, which claims to offer precise control of the alignment of liquid crystal molecules in an LCD panel structure. Future generations of its LCD screens will pack the tech.

10 His master's cinema

HMV and distributor/cinema operator Curzon Artificial Eye have teamed up to bring 'quality cinema and entertainment to the heart of local communities' by integrating digital cinemas into space tied to existing HMV stores. Promising an eclectic mix of art house flicks and blockbusters, the first 'hmvcurzon' is officially opening in a space above HMV's Wimbledon branch on October 23. It features three digital cinema auditoriums with seating for a total of 265 people.

Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

Indy 5 getting closer



Harrison Ford has said that the story for a fifth *Indiana Jones*... outing is 'already taking shape'. Hopefully Lucas will leave the aliens and CG monkeys at home this time around...

Say it ain't so!

Bad news action fans – we're going to have to wait even longer for the Stallone, Statham, Li, and Lundgren explode-athon *The Expendables*. The film's release has been delayed from April 2010 to August 2010. Boo!

All-star team

The casting rumours for next year's big-budget *A-Team* movie continue. If things go to plan we'll get to see Bradley Cooper as Face, Liam Neeson as Hannibal, Quinton 'Rampage' Jackson as BA, *District 9*'s Sharlto Copley as 'Howling Mad' Murdock and, bizarrely, Jessica Biel as the evil army general pursuing the team.

Dead again

Filmmakers just can't leave George Romero's zombie classic *Night of the Living Dead* alone. We've already had colourised versions, re-edits and a couple of remakes, and next up will be *Night of the Living Dead: Origins* – a 3D CG animation.

Cinematic Kryptonite



Legal entanglements and lacklustre box office figures look to have scuppered Warner Bros' plans for a cinematic reboot of *Superman*. Speaking to MTV, DC Entertainment's new president Diane Nelson revealed that, 'It's a key part of the family, but we don't have current plans.'

Cable coding

How manufacturers have reacted to the Deep Colour debacle

Monster Cable was quick to see the Deep Colour problem – and the market opportunity. It has created its own 'speed rated' labelling system which will baffle many consumers: Standard Speed for basic HD; High Speed for 1080p with 8bit colour; Advanced High Speed for 1080p with 12bit colour, Ultra High Speed for 1080p at 100Hz with 8bit colour and Ultimate High Speed for 1080p, 100Hz and 12bit colour.

Rich Baxter, Monster's Senior Trainer in Europe, pledges: 'Any Monster Ultra High Speed cable and above carries a Cable for Life program. Monster will replace the cable free of charge with a faster-rated HDMI cable that will carry the signal needed for the customer's new hardware.'

Elsewhere, QED offers arguably the clearest, simple guidance. The 'Performance', 'Reference' and 'Signature' ranges will now be marked '8bit Colour', '12bit Deep Colour' and '16bit True Deep Colour'.

Brian Casagrande, Senior Product Manager for cable gurus IXOS, defends HDMI connector manufacturers: 'It is extremely difficult to truly future-proof,' he told HCC. 'The HDMI organisation is very similar to Apple and keeps everything very tight-lipped.'

Not my problem:

High-end equipment like Pioneer's LX91 Blu-ray player supports Deep Colour – but some HDMI cables don't

HDMI loses connection

Deep Colour equipment puts strain on HDMI labelling system

There is deep trouble brewing with Deep Colour, the new system which lets HDTVs display more accurate colour. If your HDMI cables cannot cope with the extra digital information they will be asked to carry, the result will be no colour at all – in fact no pictures at all and no sound either. For many people the dark screen and silence will be utterly bewildering, because there will usually be no onscreen error message.

When the problem has been identified, there will be two options; either disable the Deep Colour feature altogether or replace your existing HDMI cables and switches with more expensive versions. If your cables have been custom-installed in trunking they will have to be ripped out. That could be a major headache for thousands of home cinema owners.

The HDMI Licensing Organisation in California sets evolving standards – there have been six major HDMI release versions in six years – but it has never created a consumer-friendly labelling system.

Bit by bit

Current DVDs and Blu-ray discs and HD broadcasts use 8bit colour. The red, green and blue signals are in 8bit digital words, making a total of 24 bits, which can capture 16.7 million distinct colours or 'TrueColour'.

HDMI v 1.3, finalised in June 2006, enabled

Deep Colour with 10, 12, or 16 bits per colour to give totals of 30, 36, or 48 bits and much greater colour accuracy or 'depth'.

Although it is unlikely that there will be a new format for Blu-ray or HDTV to deliver more raw bits, the latest BD players have circuitry which intelligently upscales an 8bit signal to 10 or more bits, in much the same way that players and TVs upscale 625-line pictures to 1080-line HD. The latest TV sets can handle better than 8bit colour signals, too.

Of course, not all home equipment can handle 10/12/16 bit colour. So the source, such



Pioneer's Technology Head, Philippe Coppens, has a warning for cable makers

as a Blu-ray player, exchanges electrical handshakes with the TV or projector, via HDMI, to tell each other what they can deliver and receive, and to set up the best working combination.

Problems arise when the cable itself is the weak link, something HCC recently witnessed first-hand during a testing session with Pioneer. Philippe Coppens, Pioneer's Technology Head in Europe, hooked up one of the company's new BD players to a Kuro TV set. Both fully support Deep Colour, and the bitrates needed, but with some HDMI cables he got a dark, picture-free screen.

Because he is an engineer, Coppens soon realised that some of his HDMI cables were unable

to handle the extra bits needed. When he dug around into the TV menu options and turned off Deep Colour, the 'bad' cables worked.

Says Coppens: 'The player says, "I can deliver 36 bits or 48 bits at 1080p," and the display says, "Okay I can accept that, send it". And then you get nothing on the screen because the hardware doesn't know the cables can't carry it. The problem hasn't yet

been recognised. But this will soon change as more Deep Colour hardware becomes available.'

The HDMI Organisation has defined two cable categories: Category 1 can carry a 74.25MHz signal and is marked as a 'Standard HDMI Cable'. Category 2 can carry up to a 340MHz signal and is marked as a 'High-Speed HDMI Cable'.

The HDMI Organisation has now – after HCC's Barry Fox raised the issue – clarified that Standard cables can carry 2.25 Gbps and High Speed cables are good for 10.2 Gbps: 'A High Speed cable can handle whatever application is out there that uses as much of the specified HDMI bandwidth that is possible,' says HDMI's recently-appointed President Steve Venuti.

Pioneer's Philippe Coppens agrees but also has a warning: 'Until recently the cable manufacturers were not explicitly indicating which category their cables were – and HS cables were rare. Many users, therefore, most likely have standard cables in their homes.'

Essentially, HCC advises those buying new HDMI cables to first check whether they are Deep Colour Ready. Many aren't ●



QED cables offer simple and easy-to-understand labelling



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Sony's SS-AR1s are built using birch from the forests of Finland

Sony's best kept secret?

Steve May enjoys an exclusive audition of high-end AR1 speakers

It's a curious fact that you can't buy Sony's best-sounding speakers in the UK or Europe. The SS-AR1 have won multiple awards in the Japanese press, but remain largely unknown outside their home turf. That's an AV travesty, as they challenge the finest in the world.

'Our image isn't so great in speakers,' admits Motoyuki Sugiura, from Sony's audio division, 'but we want to show that we have the ability to make high-end speakers.'

The SS-AR1s certainly do that. These three-way floorstanders pack twin 8in aluminium woofers, one 5in paper cone mid-driver and a 1in dome tweeter, and they are undeniably high-end, but their price, which translates to around £8,000 each, certainly doesn't make them extortionate in comparison with their peers.

'Some other manufactures tend to make monitor-style speakers, designed for precise detail, but if you are looking for musicality, then you need something a little different,' explains Sugiura. 'The designer of the AR1s, Yoshiyuki Kaku, set about recreating the ambiance of a concert. When you are in a hall, the first thing you feel is the air. There's no sound, but you can feel the air. And that's what he has tried to recreate. When you press play on your CD, you will notice the change in the air...'

HCC auditioned the speakers with a trio of tracks, one classical, one female vocal and a final bass solo – the clarity on the latter was so good it was possible to hear the distortion caused by the original recording level being set too high. For the demo, the electronics were all provided by Sony, while the interconnect came from Kimber.

Glorious good wood

The build quality of the AR1s is truly luscious. The cabinet itself is made of birch from Finland, chosen for its excellent resonance; the baffle boards are made of maple, sourced from Hokkaido. 'We are very careful



Motoyuki Sugiura, from Sony's audio division, is determined to raise the company's high-end profile

about where we select the wood from,' confides Sugiura, 'and the period we cut the trees.'

It's always in November, because that's when the trees are getting tighter and the wood has good resonance and stability.' The aluminium driver units come from Danish maker Scan Speak. Two boards separate the woofer and mid-range tweeter, to provide a cavity wall-style insulation. The speaker itself is finished in piano black gloss, and **each comes with an extruded maple plaque personally signed by the designer.**

Interestingly, the speakers offer only a single wire connection (no bi-wiring is possible). 'That is key to the philosophy of the design,' I was told.

The original speakers, which weigh 57kg each, were joined in the Sony range last December by a sibling pair, the AR2, which are somewhat smaller. These typically sell in Japan for around £6,000 each.

Says Sony's Eric Kingdon of the AR1s: 'They're not difficult to set up. There's none of the messing around that you have to do with some top-end products. They just need room to breathe.'

The astounding thing about the speakers is that they effectively hang in space. The sonic image they create stands quite apart from the enclosures themselves. It's as if the cabinets have dissolved.

'Whether it's a movie soundtrack or two-channel, there's no feeling of the box,' boasts Kingdon. 'And that's the hardest thing to get rid of. They are remarkable.'

So when will UK fans get to hear them? 'We'll let you know...' is Sony's only reply ●

In sync

Making mismatched speaker systems more coherent, Sony-style

While many of us probably couldn't afford to buy a 5.1 array of Sony's astounding SS-AR1 speakers (even if they were available in the UK), the Japanese giant has developed some new audio signal processing which it says can make regular speakers sound 'much more coherent.'

Its Automatic Phase Matching (APM) technology will debut on the brand's upcoming TA-DA5500ES 7.1 network receiver, which is currently going through final sound-tuning in Tokyo. The audio processing sets out to match the phase-frequency characteristics of your left/centre/right speakers with the rear surrounds, equalizing differences in physical size and tonal character.

Eric Kingdon, who is working on the model with legendary Sony audio engineer Takashi Kanai, told HCC: 'APM effectively removes phase anomalies between the speakers. When you engage the correction, it's like the soundstage has been snapped into focus. It transforms mismatched speakers.'



The 5500ES also promises other sonic enhancements, including superior DSP. 'We've gone back and re-measured everything for higher-resolution playback,' explains Kingdon. 'For our new HD Digital Cinema Sound (HD DCS) processing modes, we've used higher-accuracy microphones to measure the audio characteristics of the Cary Grant dubbing theatres at Sony Pictures Studios in Culver City. HD DCS offers three levels of reverberation, to emulate the ambiance of both smaller dubbing stages or larger theatres.'

'The DCAC (Digital Cinema Auto Calibration) on this model is also a significant improvement on previous editions,' concludes the man from Sony.





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POINT OF VIEW

Richard Stevenson returns from a tropical holiday with a bone to pick with Hollywood and a ringing in his ears

The film's plot line goes something like this: A dashing handsome international journalist in a remote part of Indonesia gets caught up in an earthquake and then blown up by bandits... but survives to tell the tale. Our doughty hero, with a dry Martini in one hand and Angelina Jolie in the other, returns to Blighty with dramatic new information that will rock the home cinema world to the core. And best yet – it's a true story.

Well almost. Angelina Jolie couldn't make the final scene so it was actually the wife. And the revelation? The news that will shake the home cinema world from Tokyo to Tooting? It is this: Hollywood earthquakes and Hollywood explosions on DVDs, Blu-rays and in commercial cinemas sound nothing, and I really do mean nothing, like the real thing.

At 3pm local time on September 2, a powerful earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter Scale struck the Indonesian Island of Java, killing 44 people. Its epicentre was 70 miles off-shore in the Indian Ocean. At the same time, some 500miles to the East near the island of Komodo there was something else off-shore in the Indian Ocean. It was me and the missus, on a scuba-diving holiday, 30m down, looking at seahorses.

Now I admit that not too many earthquake films have scenes underwater, mostly because swaying buildings are a whole lot more exciting than swaying fish, but the experience was sublime. It was almost silent. Not because there wasn't a sound but because the sound was so very, very deep. **For four or five seconds there was this enveloping, crushing vibration that felt like it was going to build to a life-threatening proportion**, and then it quickly subsided. I wet my wet-suit.

'Oh yeah that was a tremor, we get them all the time here,' said the dive guide back on the boat – before we knew the extent of the damage

on the mainland. Funny, I don't recall that being mentioned in the brochure...

Pure dynamite

Leaving Komodo and its dragons behind, we set sail for a neighbouring island to scout some manta-rays. We found a bay with a coral reef and a couple of fishing boats and dived in. The locals then decided to go fishing. With dynamite.

Holy cow. While the earthquake tamed by 500miles of ocean was near silent, the explosion at just 500 metres away was, by far, the loudest, sharpest, most visceral thing I have ever experienced. It was not the deep warbling rumble of underwater explosions in action flicks, it was an ultra-fast, single wave-front impact that will forever make sub-woofers sound glacier-slow. It was directional too – I know, because I was facing it. There was pain, then blackness and then stars – the genuine Wile-E-Coyote cartoon ones at that.

Recalling the actual sound was quite difficult at first. Largely because my hearing was numb and I had tinnitus. But what a sound! The explosion was sharp and crisply defined with razor-edge clarity. There was no sub-bass boom or rumbling overhang. It was a single, potent impact of frequencies high up the spectrum that ended as abruptly and sharply as it started.

Sadly, I didn't get a chance to reprimand the local fisherman in a manner I thought befitting – with a harpoon. By the time we surfaced and checked we still had our arms and legs, the fishermen had scooped up their quarry and gone.

But lessons have been learned. Firstly, while we may enjoy Hollywood's sonic interpretation of explosions and earthquakes, they are a long way removed from reality. Secondly, that is a good thing. And thirdly, next year I am holidaying in Bognor ●

For more of Richard Stevenson's ramblings log on to www.homecinemachoice.com/points_of_view

We've had him checked out by an ear specialist and can confirm **Richard Stevenson** can still hear well enough to review AV receivers. Just



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DVD ADDICT

This issue **The Beek** wonders if Blu-ray's brightest future resides in cinema's past...

Confession time. The column you're now reading isn't the one I was going to write. I had originally intended to wax lyrical about the tortuous release history of the portmanteau horror film *Trick 'r Treat*, which Warner Home Video has now begrudgingly released straight-to-DVD on both sides of the Atlantic some two years after it was once scheduled to hit cinemas. I'd hoped to help this delightful flick find as wide an audience as possible – it really deserves it – and to give my snide, cynical, BD-Live-hating side a rest. But don't panic – while the subject of this column has changed, my upbeat mood hasn't.

The joyous atmosphere pervading the DVD Addict household is all thanks to world cinema specialist Eureka Entertainment. More specifically, the addition of FW Murnau's 1927 film *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* to its Masters of Cinema Blu-ray lineup. Now, while the very idea of **releasing a silent movie from the late 1920s in hi-def might seem like an anachronism** to some home cinema fans – perhaps those whose idea of HD entertainment begins and ends with Michael Bay – I believe that this could be the most important release yet in the Blu format's history.

Golden oldie

I'd already seen *Sunrise* a few times before this Blu-ray edition, most recently when Eureka added the title to its DVD catalogue in 2005. While the print certainly showed some wear and tear, that DVD release was very impressive. In fact, it was hard to imagine just what a BD could possibly do to improve on it significantly...

In turns out I should have had more faith. The difference in the imagery between the two is like night and day, with the BD delivering a clarity,

sharpness and depth that is remarkable for a film that is more than 80 years old. Okay, there is still plenty of print damage evident in both versions (the Blu-ray includes the 94-minute Movietone release and an alternate 79-minute silent version recently discovered in the Czech Republic), but what else do you expect from a film of this vintage? As the distributor itself says in the accompanying booklet: 'Heartened by Fox's US release of [HD] masters without any heavy-handed digital restoration, we decided against HD-DVNR, MTI, or other forms of grain removal... The level of damage still present is exactly what you'd see if you were to project the same 35mm film restoration theatrically'. Commendable sentiments, and ones I agree with wholeheartedly.

So it's a great disc for a very old movie. But why is it so important? Well, to my mind it points to an untapped market for Blu-ray – that of archiving early material from around the world in the highest quality possible, and making it accessible to a wide audience. That would be great, as due to the age and condition of many silent movies, there seems to have been a feeling that standard-def DVD is sufficient. This means your only other option is to try and catch prints shown at dedicated film festivals, or hunt down copies held in places like the BFI's National Archive. *Sunrise* shows that, when handled properly, even the oldest of movies can be brought to your viewing room in a way true to the original source material.

So, naturally I hope it does good BD business, encouraging other distributors to venture into the market with their own titles. If not... well, at least Eureka is committed, and has the likes of the recently-discovered original cut of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* lined up for a future hi-def release ●

For more wit and wisdom from *The Beek* go to www.homecinemachoice.com/dvd_addict

Anton van Beek has started walking at double-speed, and only communicates via interstitials and a jazzy soundtrack



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DEEP FOCUS

Hollywood insider **Jon Thompson** worries that the British film industry isn't ready for 3D technology just yet

I've just watched another Brit-directed flick – there's two hours of my life I will never get back. It seems to me that we just don't make cinema in this country, we make TV movies instead. This is, of course, depressing. After all this time we still haven't learnt that cinema is cinema and TV is something small in the corner of the room. Of course, now we have bigger screens at home maybe people will notice.

The film in question was *The Invention of Lying*, the directorial début of Ricky Gervais. Okay, *Extras* was funny but it was TV and so was *The Office*. His new film is a comedy, but nothing like the Ealing classics which had both style and scope – essential ingredients for the next wave of cinema...

Now every time someone pitches me an idea for a film they slip in the idea that it could be in 3D. To do 3D well you really need to understand cinema – it needs to have the aforementioned scale. With no scale, 3D looks flatter than roadkill. I recently saw a Sky TV demo of 3D. It was interesting because although I thought football didn't work at all, as it was shot on long lenses and there was no real 3D effect, boxing, shot from the ringside with wide lenses, made me duck.

Recently, while at the IBC exhibition in Amsterdam again (again? Yes, the business only seems to want to go to two places in the world – Amsterdam and Las Vegas), I saw a demo done by In-Three. This Californian-based company is currently making waves in Hollywood thanks to its cutting-edge 'dimensionalization' process, which upconverts 2D-shot footage into three-dimensional material. **It's been getting rave reviews from the likes of Peter Jackson and George Lucas.** 'It's shockingly good, and you can see how people would want to go see it,' says the *Star Wars* guru. 'It means we can repurpose a lot of old movies, and at the same time it really gives a whole new dimension to the movies we're making now.'

In-Three was most recently responsible for the 3D version of the smash hit kiddie-friendly flick *G-Force* (pictured). The film itself was funny and very good as far as 3D is concerned – showing that dimensionalization is a viable alternative to shooting in 3D. The latter doesn't work that well when it comes to traditional filmmaking; the rigs are too bulky and the inter-ocular problems have yet to be overcome.

So it could be that 2D-to-3D conversion is the real future of the format. I believe the tech is up to the task; In-Three showed its work converting the Lionsgate logo into 3D, which is problematic as it features things like moving clouds and smoke, but it was made to look as real as you would expect – not an easy thing to do.

Going back to find the future

The team at In-Three has compiled a wishlist of the titles they think are ripe for 2D-to-3D conversion. It reads like an AV geek's dream movie marathon – *Star Wars Episode IV*, *The Matrix*, *Jurassic Park*, *Star Wars Episode VI*, *The Fifth Element*, *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, *Star Wars Episode V*, *Indiana Jones – Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Back to the Future*. It's obvious that the company thinks the key to really good 3D is to think big, something which I agree with, and which comes back to my sadness that Britain has yet to really grasp the world of cinema, let alone 3D.

We used to have some great filmmakers in the UK, we made some great films on a grand scale, but the last well-made action film by a Brit was *The Bourne Ultimatum*. Paul Greengrass is a great British filmmaker, but we need more people like him. It's my fear that we're about to be overwhelmed by a glut of bad UK 3D films. I just hope that I am wrong and real talent in Blighty gets to shine once again! ●

What older movies would you like to see 'dimensionalized'?
Let us know via hcc@futurenet.co.uk

As a post-production expert, **Jon Thompson's** movie credits include *Casino Royale*, *Children of Men* and *Mission: Impossible 3*



Tech diary

The world of AV and film changes fast. **HCC's calendar** is here to make sure you don't miss out

Jennifer's Body:
Can Megan Fox reboot the horror comedy genre?



| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| | | | | 23 <p>Cirque Du Freak... American Pie director Paul Weitz adapts the first of Darren Shan's popular 'tween' vampire books (full title: <i>Cirque Du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant</i>). See it at UK cinemas from today universalpictures.com</p> | 24 <p>Smile! On this day in 1946, a 35mm black-and-white camera onboard the V-2 No.13 White Sands rocket became the first man-made object to photograph Earth from outer space – from an altitude of 65 miles!</p> | 25 <p>RIP Legendary horror icon Vincent Price died on this day in 1993. Remember him at his horrific best with a DVD double-bill of <i>The Masque of the Red Death</i> and <i>Witchfinder General</i></p> |
| 26 <p>Trick 'r Treat Having spent a year stuck on the shelves at Warner Bros, this cracking anthology horror film at last gets a UK release – albeit straight-to-DVD</p> | | | 29 <p>It's alive! This day marks the 40th anniversary of the first ever computer-to-computer link, via ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), the US Department of Defence's precursor to the internet</p> | 30 <p>Michael Jackson's This Is It Moving tribute to a groundbreaking musician or lame cash-in on a celebrity death? Decide for yourself when this compilation of Jacko's final rehearsal footage moonwalks into cinemas across the UK this Friday</p> | 31 <p>Halloween On the spookiest night of the year, there's no better movie choice than John Carpenter's slasher epic <i>Halloween</i>. Just make sure you don't pick up Rob Zombie's insipid remake instead!</p> | |
| 02 <p>Public Enemies Michael Mann's cops 'n' robbers tale about the FBI's pursuit of John Dillinger (Johnny Depp) arrives on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK this Monday. Expect a surround mix packed with Tommy Gun fire</p> | | 04 <p>Connections Europe Amsterdam's Movenpick Hotel hosts this one-day trade summit dedicated to digital lifestyle solutions in Europe. Topics this year include 'The impact of 3DTV' and 'The three-screen ecosystem' www.connectionseurope.com</p> | 05 <p>Jennifer's Body It doesn't open at UK cinemas until tomorrow, but some Megan Fox fans will probably start queuing today to get front row tickets to this hotly-anticipated high-school horror-comedy www.jennifersbody.com</p> | 06 <p>The Homebuilding & Renovating Show This three-day exhibition, starting today at the Harrogate International Centre, is a good starting point if you're building a home from scratch or just looking to integrate the latest digital tech</p> | | 08 <p>Gretchen Moll Indie film favourite Gretchen Moll turns 37 today. If you aren't familiar with her body (of work) we recommend watching her scorching lead turn in the excellent biopic <i>The Notorious Bettie Page</i></p> |
| 09 <p>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs Disney kicks off its Diamond Collection with a Blu-ray of its first ever feature-length animation. The set includes a fully remastered 1080p encode of the 1937 classic and 7.1 lossless audio</p> | | | | 13 <p>2012 Roland 'ID4 and Day After Tomorrow' Emmerich is getting ready to destroy the world all over again, this time courtesy of a global cataclysm predicted by Mayan calendars. Witness the destruction at UK cinemas this Friday</p> | | 15 <p>NBC The National Broadcasting Company (NBC), was officially formed by the Radio Corporation of America on this day in 1926. It immediately began work on 11,327 episodes of <i>Friends</i></p> |
| 16 <p>Star Trek Forget the Trekkie killjoys moaning about continuity – JJ Abrams' bigscreen reboot of the cult sci-fi series was the best blockbuster of the year. <i>Star Trek</i> beams up to UK stores on DVD and BD today</p> | 17 <p>evenTech Ireland Dublin's Industries Hall is the venue for this two-day event – an entertainment and installation technology exhibit designed specifically to cater to the Irish market www.eventech-ireland.com</p> | 18 <p>Whistlin' Mickey On this day back in 1928, Walt Disney released <i>Steamboat Willie</i>, the first fully synchronized sound cartoon and the third appearance of rodent stars Mickey and Minnie Mouse</p> | 19 <p>HCC #176 Start saving your pennies for HCC #176. Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands this Thursday, packed with hardware tests, installs, features, outspoken opinions and full-on software reviews www.homecinemachoice.com</p> | | | |



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RX-V365 AV Receiver SRP: £250



RX-V3900 AV Receiver SRP: £1,500



January 2009

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Tech trends that rocked IFA

Berlin's annual technology expo is the traditional launchpad for cutting-edge consumer electronics in Europe. **HCC** went along to discover why TV will change for ever in 2010...

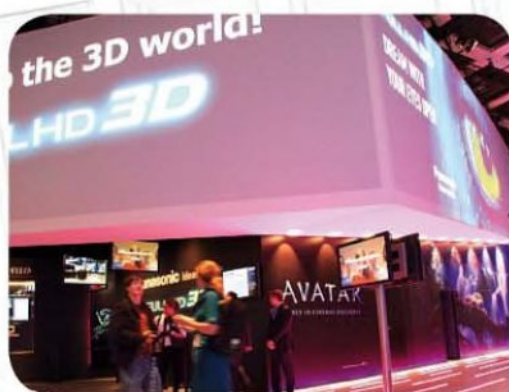


Abandon hope all ye who enter here: The annual IFA tech fest is a gruelling experience for the unwary -- but AV heads will find much to savour

Home of 3D:

The Panasonic booth was dominated by 3D tech. At the centre was a 3D screening room showing the trailer for *Avatar*

Mech tech: If the big screens didn't float your boat, then the life-size *Avatar* mech certainly did



Panasonic claims Blu-ray 3D crown...

'We will be the first with Full HD 3D!' was the battle cry from Panasonic at its IFA tech preview – at the same time that the Blu-ray Disc Association, the final decision-makers when it comes to Blu-ray specs, would only say that a decision would be reached this December. Not that Panasonic bigwig Mamoru Yoshida was going to let that steal his company's thunder: 'The BDA is adopting our Full HD 3D concept. We are not just device manufacturers. We strongly believe in creating a synergy between 3D content and 3D products, and we are the only AV manufacturer with a research and development laboratory in Hollywood. We have put all our research and development into 3D'.

It was no surprise, then, to find Panasonic's stand dominated by a giant Mech from James Cameron's forthcoming 3D sci-fi flick *Avatar*. In fact, Panasonic had little to show at IFA apart from 3D demos. It did, however, reveal that it has set itself the ambitious task of doubling flatscreen sales next year. According to the brand's European CEO Laurent Abadie, Panasonic will sell '15.5 million TVs in 2010.' 3D, alongside new eco technologies, is being positioned to drive growth.

...but PlayStation 3 could steal it

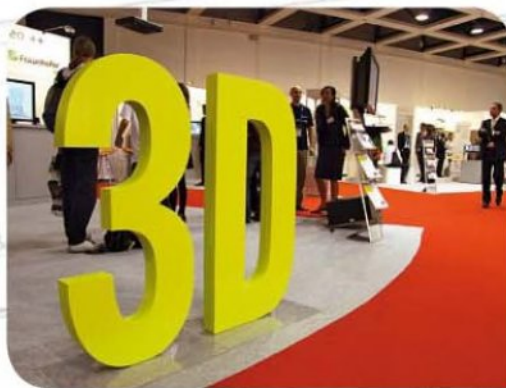
Fellow consumer electronics giant Sony also left show-goers in no doubt of its tech plans, pledging to launch a full range of 3D home entertainment products during 2010, and bringing its popular PlayStation 3 console into the mix.

CEO Howard Stringer announced that Sony was fully behind the BDA's standardisation of a Blu-ray specification for Full HD 3D, and that it would release screens to support the development, alongside a new generation of Blu-ray machines.

'3D is clearly on its way to the mass-market, and as with high-definition a few years back, there are a variety of issues yet to be addressed, but the 3D train is on the track and we at Sony are ready to drive it home!' he declared.

The PlayStation 3 will be upgraded to support 3D playback of Blu-ray discs some time next year. Indeed, the Sony chief made a point of highlighting the 3D potential of future PS3 games, showing clips from *Motorstorm Pacific Rift* and *Grand Turismo* in the format.

However not all the world's CE companies appear to be playing 3D ball. Philips in particular urged caution about the rush to 3D. While it unveiled a prototype 21:9 3D set, it said it will wait until there is a proven market for spectacle-based home 3D before launching products. Other major brands, including Samsung, Toshiba and Sharp, remained silent on the technology



Talk of the town: 3D technology was everywhere at IFA, with most visitors enjoying the chance to try out the format



Supermodels: Samsung's cavernous booth had some of the best-looking displays at the show. And, if you got lost, its hi-def honeys were on hand to show you the way out...

Stein time: IFA is the only tech expo in the world where you can walk from a hall full of hi-tech kit, to a beer tent overflowing with foaming German beer



IFA bites

We spotlight the best of the new AV kit spotted in Berlin

Onkyo power



Hi-fi and AV specialist Onkyo finally unveiled its long-awaited multichannel power amp at IFA. The new 9-channel PA-MC5500 amplifier combines with Onkyo's processor to offer an audiophile alternative to its popular AVRs. An Onkyo spokesman told HCC: 'The amp will join the 9.2-channel PR-SC5507 and BD-SP807 Blu-ray player to become Onkyo's flagship AV system.' The PA-MC5500 will be released worldwide early 2010.

LG Soundbar



Never content with something as simple as a straightforward Blu-ray player (remember its BD/HD DVD combi deck?), LG has unveiled a soundbar with built-in Blu-ray spinner. Due to arrive in the UK in November (price TBA), the HLB54S Blu-ray Soundbar claims a maximum power output of 430W and ships with a wireless subwoofer.

JVC thin & stylish



The JVC booth introduced a range of AV kit designed to deliver maximum fun in a minimum space. Quite apart from a pencil-thin 2.1 soundbar system, the brand unveiled a new range of ultra-slim LCD TVs (both LED and CCFL) and gave a first look at the potential of 3D projection, stacking two of its D-ILA models on top of each other. A twin-lens D-ILA 3D projector is expected next year.

IFA bites

The best of the rest of the new AV kit spotted in Berlin

Toshiba LED and XDE



Toshiba launched its REGZA SV LED TV series at IFA. Packaged in 46in and 55in screen sizes, the new models have stylish design and 10bit video processing. The TV's also boast Toshiba's MetaBrain engine – which sounds like a supervillain but actually delivers AV treats like Resolution+ upscaling for SD sources, and AutoView to dynamically adjust picture parameters. 200Hz processing is also onboard.



While Toshiba's debut Blu-ray player stole most of the attention at IFA, the brand did show a new XDE DVD deck in slimline guise. Missing, though, was its long-promised widget-enabled Net Player. That particular box is now not expected to launch until Spring 2010.

Sharp LED



LCD innovator Sharp is bringing LED backlighting to its mainstream TV range, and staged convincing demos of new LED Aquos panels at the show. Seen side-by-side with older CCFL models, the new sets demonstrated outstanding brightness and superior colour reproduction. Gone, though, is the RGB LED tech from last year's flagship LC-52XSIE – the brand's new range uses the cheaper white diodes favoured by its rivals.

LG hopes for world without borders

LG was determined to make a splash at IFA with its new Borderless TV range, devoting its entire press conference to this one topic and kicking things off with a curious video that appeared to put the impact of Borderless TV on a par with the fall of the Berlin Wall. The company then introduced its two new Borderless screens, the SL8000 and SL9000, both of which it claims 'break the conventions of how TVs are supposed to look'.

Spec-wise, they have real appeal; the flagship SL9000 features Bluetooth and HD DivX compatibility, plus an LED-backlight-enabled contrast claim of 3,000,000:1.

However, there was some confusion when the screens were finally unveiled. LG's accompanying imagery led many to believe that Borderless TV referred to screens with a greatly reduced bezel, but those on show had surrounds larger as large as many existing TVs. After much discussion it transpired that Borderless refers to the network connective functionality of the TVs and, more importantly, a molding technique that eliminates the *seam* between the screen and the surrounding bezel. An LG spokesman eventually admitted to HCC that the misleading images represent the 'ultimate end goal of the Borderless range, the elimination of the bezel' – rather than current technology. Ho-hum.

Thankfully, the Korean brand had more tangible forward-thinking technology on display in the form of its innovative Magic Motion Remote Control. An attempt to simplify the current trend for overcomplicated remote controls, this single-button 'wand' uses a gyro-sensor to let users move an onscreen cursor. One click brings up a simple-to-navigate OSD, with sub-menus offering more detailed picture settings and slider-based controls. A hands-on with the wizardy remote proved it to be responsive, but access to the in-depth settings wasn't functioning.



Here Wii go: LG believes that the future of remote controls lies in gesture-based devices similar to those used by the Nintendo Wii

LG large and small: Crowds gathered to peer at LG's first commercial OLED proposition, a diminutive 15in model likely to sell for around £3,000 when it goes on sale in the UK next year. LG suggests that a 32in model will follow – better start saving your pennies. The difference in bezel size between the brand's 'Borderless' LCD range (bottom) and its press image (inset) attracted equal attention...



HD sound completes the picture

Radius^{HD} series

We've enhanced the world's original 'hi-fi' sat/sub speaker systems with new technologies to deliver all the rich dynamic detail of HD audio in a style that's perfect for every room. New Radius^{HD} provides pin-sharp contemporary design across nine models and in a choice of luxury lacquer and real-wood finishes.

R90HD10 

"Stylish, discreet and flexible design; very clear, solid and large delivery; awesomely authoritative subwoofer"

- What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision November 2008



Samsung drops the O, keeps LED

Although Samsung has decided not to replace its current range of LCD and LED TVs this year, opting to continue with the B650, B7000 and B8000 series panels that have proven incredibly popular, the company has developed an LED backlit screen that it hopes will take 2010 by storm.

The new TV uses side-firing LEDs behind an LCD front panel, just like with the current 7000 and 8000 series sets, but is a mere 6mm thick – that's thinner than an iPhone. It also features some of the company's latest picture processing technologies, such as 200Hz, and highly impressive contrast levels.

There are currently no details on an exact release date or price, or even if the tuner comes in the display or in a separate box (*a la* Sony's ultra-thin ZX1), but we expect that the as-yet unnamed TV will be available in several screen sizes, from 40in to 55in.

With monetary belts being tightened across the board, Samsung also gave strong indication at IFA that it is postponing any plans for largescreen OLED TV production, ploughing its not inconsiderable coffers into LED. However, that's not to say the Korean giant doesn't have an OLED display prepped for when the global recession lifts.

Although it's previously been shown at trade fairs, the security around Samsung's 31in OLED TV has always been stringent, to the extent that few pictures exist. At IFA, however, the Korean tech brand was keen to have everybody and its dog take a gander – we suspect it had something to do with arch-rival LG touting its own 15in OLED telly.

Obviously, with no firm plans set for the TV, there are few details. But *HCC* can reveal that the incredibly thin screen is Full HD and, from this showing at least, features black levels and colour response that betters even the company's own LED TVs.

The changing face of TV:

Samsung was the only TV maker to show an Ultra High Definition screen (below) at the show. No onsale date for its 8 million-pixel images, though. Other highlights include superthin LED (top right) and web TV (bottom right)



White star: Samsung's 31in OLED panel made an appearance, but the brand was keener to promote its LED-lit LCD screens

Spectacular: A floating circle of flatscreens dominated Samsung's IFA booth



IFA in numbers

3

The depth in mm of LG's 15in OLED TV

1,164

With this many exhibitors touting products and tech, it's no wonder the show lasts six days

25,000

Of this many foreign trade visitors to the show, only three came from *Home Cinema Choice*

121,000

The amount of square metres of floorspace used for the show. Which is more than 12 football pitches

228,600

The total number of attendees (trade and public) approached a quarter of a million this year – an 8 per cent increase on the 2008 show. Recession? Pah!





DENON

Experience a new dimension in Home Cinema



AVR-1910 High Definition AV receiver | DBP-2010 Blu-ray Player // This mighty duo offers three outstanding characteristics that will lift you up to a new dimension of home cinema: More than 50 experts of the renowned EISA Awards Jury have voted the AVR-1910 to be the best home theatre receiver 2009-2010. Its Dolby ProLogic IIz sound program supports two additional front height speakers to deliver an even more spacial surround experience. And last but not least: the DBP-2010 offers BD Profile 2.0, multiple format playback as well as leading edge 10-bit video processing to get the most even out of your old DVDs. Go and visit this show first at your local retailer or www.denon.co.uk



*Best Home Cinema Receiver 2009-2010
Denon AVR-1910*

LG's new SL9000 Series TVs offer the thinnest sets and clearest picture, and they are incredibly energy-efficient.

The stylish SL9000, with its unique flush-fitting screen and dazzling LED backlighting, is only 29.3mm thick, yet still manages to provide astounding picture quality with a 3,000,000:1 contrast ratio. It's also efficient enough to shave up to 40 per cent off your energy bill.

Live Borderless is the motto and it is LG's ground-breaking LED technology and innovative design that has allowed the SL9000 series to slim down and swap the restricting frame for a seamless single layer of glass, which fits flush like an infinity swimming pool.

There are 42in and 47in models available, both of which come fully equipped with four HDMI ports to hook up your Blu-ray player and other devices. There's even Bluetooth compatibility, to wirelessly beam your latest snaps and music to the full-HD 1080p screen.

In short, this is the ultimate hi-def experience for your home. Brilliant.



The details

A Frameless design

The SL9000's unique, single-layer design virtually eliminates the space between the screen and bezel, for a seamless look

B Ultra-slim

LEDs around the perimeter of the frame enable the SL9000 to be just 29.3mm thick

C Entertainment hub

With four HDMI ports, USB (with HD Movie playback), Bluetooth and PC input, you can connect the SL9000 to all your media

D Picture perfect

With a contrast ratio of 3,000,000:1, the SL9000 delivers ultra-crisp images and deeper blacks

E Power saver

LG LED technology saves you up to 40 per cent on your energy bills and the SL9000 is also certified by the Energy Saving Trust

Future of TV

LG's use of LED technology means the SL9000 series offers a peerless viewing experience



There's even Bluetooth for beaming your latest snaps from your mobile phone



LG offers so many cutting-edge TV technologies, from integrated Freesat HD tuners bringing subscription-free hi-def channels to picture-enhancing 100Hz processing, that choosing the perfect set could be a little daunting. Don't panic, our simple step-by-step online guide will help you find your ideal LG TV in just a few quick clicks.

www.lge.co.uk/tvguide

‘There’s a huge brand awareness for Blu- but some



Rich Marty works for arguably the most Blu-ray-focused studio in the world – as VP of New Business Development at Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, he’s long been a driving force behind the format. **Anton van Beek** quizzed him on everything Blu from BD-Live to Lawrence of Arabia...

ray

people still don't realise that it plays their DVD's



Firstly, how is Blu-ray doing three years since its launch?

The platform continues to evolve, and we can continually do new things and add to it. The core proposition will always be that it's the perfect high-definition picture, the best available. But there are other consumer segments. Some are really interested in things like digital copy – so they can have something for when they're on the go – and then there are those who always want to be connected, want to look for fresh content, have updatable things available to them. So there's a segment there that we always want to talk to, too.

Also... the Blu-ray Disc Association standard that will be finalised by the end of the year means that Blu-ray is the correct home entertainment platform for 3D to be on, because of the things you can do with it and the install base that Blu-ray has. We're completely committed to it, and we think that the format is perfectly positioned.

What about BD-Live? Are you worried that the experience users have had so far might dissuade them from checking it out again?

[An issue with] BD-Live is the way it has to be – having the network connections set up. Obviously, with the PS3 it's going to be a lot easier because it's what gamers do anyway, but there's always that first step of making sure that people's homes are wired for it. But we're committed to it. We've put it on all of our titles since last year – we always have a network portal.

So it's been a success?

Well, within our BD-Live site we have a survey. In Western Europe, based on over 3,000 respondents, 90 per cent of them are either 'very likely' or 'somewhat likely' to come back to BD-Live now they've experienced it. We get about roughly 100,000 unique visitors every week on our BD-Live network, and about 50 per cent of those are repeat visitors. So it demonstrates people are >



Look no further: Sony Pictures' Rich Marty believes Blu-ray is the correct home entertainment platform for 3D

36 BD LIVES!

BD disc delights

Five current titles that are pushing the format forward



X-Men Origins: Wolverine

20th Century Fox Home Entertainment's latest superhero flick showcases the studio's own answer to Sony's MovieIQ – its BD-Live-based Live Lookup allows users to seamlessly access IMDB (Internet Movie Database) filmogs for actors via while watching the film.



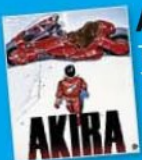
Transformers

Paramount recently showed how BD-Live can continue to develop for existing titles, making *Revenge of the Fallen* promos plus new extras relating to the first film (including exclusive deleted scenes, stunt featurettes and audition footage) available via *Transformers'* BD-Live page.



Watchmen: Director's Cut

This US All-Region import packs the extended cut of the comic caper, and Warner's funky Maximum Movie Mode. Replacing the traditional video commentary, MMM branches out of the film to split-screen before-and-after video comparisons with director Zack Snyder, as well as links to additional galleries and more.



Akira

The 192Khz 24bit Dolby TrueHD 5.1 soundtrack (overseen by composer Shoji Yamashiro) is an astonishing sonic experience that sets a new benchmark for home audio. Import this All-Region disc now!



Band of Brothers

Even TV can excel when it comes to additional content on Blu-ray. Each episode of this WWII drama is accompanied by PiP chat tracks from the surviving veterans of Easy Company, plus Interactive Field Guides providing access to real-time trivia, archival newsreel and interactive maps.



interested if there's stuff there and there's a reason to come back.

What sort of stuff?

We know that people want to see exclusive content, so it's important for us to be creating content that people will engage in.

The other thing is trailers. We can put a load of cool things in there, but the trailers always spike, because people want to see the newest things.

We also have MovieIQ, which we think is a practical, relevant application for BD-Live – a real 'killer app'.

How does that work?

Well, while you're watching a film you can push a button and it'll tell you who are the actors in the scene. You can click another button and see all of the other movies a person has been in. You click a button and it'll show you all of the songs that are playing during that scene. You can even go to production notes – it'll say this was filmed here, or that it looks like it was filmed in this location but was actually filmed somewhere else. So it's good practical information. And the info is powered by Gracenote – they're the ones responsible for providing the background information for Apple iTunes and things of that sort. We're now building this enormous database for the MovieIQ application.

Is MovieIQ only for Sony releases, or are you looking at licensing it?

It was designed with the intention of making it available to other people as well, because we want a consistency to the experience available across Blu-ray.

Angel or demon: Are things looking up for BD-Live?

Has Sony investigated the idea of micro-payments for BD-Live content?

We don't want it to be this front-facing

sell-space. I mean, there's things that you could do... when you're talking about a network connection the possibilities are limitless. You can do all types of things. A year ago BD-Live was quite different from what it is today, and it might be quite different from how it is now in the future. So it's not in our current roadmap, but the possibility is there.

Another revenue possibility is through charging a premium price for Digital Copy files of films. What's Sony stance on that idea?

The way we've approached Digital Copies is that we've made it part of the Blu-ray experience. It's a reason for people to step into BD. And because of that we don't charge extra for it. We've done a lot more of it in the US than we have in Europe, but it's just another added component for us. We'll continue to explore what titles make sense, taking into account the different international territories.

Everyone seems very excited about 3D.

Is it really the future of home entertainment?

Well, there's a process [to go through]. First of all the BDA claims it will have the specification done by the end of this year. Then we'll be working closely with our hardware counterparts to figure out when the best time is to release content. But we will definitely be working on it.

Sony has held off having 3D on Blu-ray titles so far because we feel we need to wait to do it right. It's always been a case of when they finalise the specification we've have titles that will fit the application.

Having experienced the anaglyph 3D content currently available on BD, we can understand where you're coming from!

Yeah, for us it's important that you do it right. If you don't, then it might not be the consumer experience we intend. People might not get as turned on to it as we would like. And with Blu-ray that's about delivering exceptional picture quality even when talking about 3D.

Something we hear from studios all the time is how poorly catalogue titles perform on Blu-ray at present. What's your take on this?

Well, obviously with newer formats the new



[gooooooooaa!!!]

Great games need great sound effects. You're never going to be the next 'FIFA All-Star' until you immerse yourself in surround-sound. We've built gaming modes into our whole range of AV Receivers, which is why, with Onkyo's surround-sound your gaming experience will be taken to the next level.

Gameplay, taken seriously.



38 BD LIVES!

releases are going to be the driving force. However, as more and more people start watching movies on Blu-ray, there's going to be this expectation that they can revisit their old favourites. And with the new trend in multi-tiered pricing, catalogue has recently become more competitive. We're already seeing, in the US, a large uplift in sales thanks to these various price-points. We know where the consumer wants it to be and we're reacting to it.

Sony Pictures has done fantastic work with 'modern' catalogue titles like *Ghostbusters* – but a lot of people are still holding out for the real Sony biggies like *Lawrence of Arabia*...

Well, Sony Pictures release nearly 100 titles a year, so that obviously includes a lot of catalogue. But the thing is, we go back and re-master every title specifically for Blu-ray and hi-def, because we want to make sure we do it right. First and foremost it has to hit a certain picture quality.

As for *Lawrence of Arabia*... I know people are always going to ask about that one. And it is being looked at. We just want to do it right. We're working on it. It's on the roadmap.



You've mentioned picture quality, but the other thing Blu-ray offers is lossless audio. Is that something that is hard to sell to consumers compared to hi-def image quality?

You have to be careful that you don't layer in too many messages. We found in the first year we were saying things like "It's 1080p HD, it's 7.1" – you throw in too many numbers and only a small portion of the market understands them. Audiophiles will know the difference between uncompressed and compressed audio, anyway. We're actually switching all of our titles to DTS-HD MA [from Dolby TrueHD] starting in the US in October and in Europe in November.

Really? Why?

The reason for the switch? I honestly can't say.

While Rich Marty was unwilling to discuss the reason for the switch from Dolby TrueHD to DTS-HD Master Audio on Sony Pictures' Blu-ray, it does follow a path that many of the major companies are taking with audio on the hi-def format. Since talking to Marty, HCC has put the question to several other studio insiders and according to one source, the preference for DTS-HD MA is entirely down to the perceived value of the DTS brand over that of Dolby in the eyes of the audience for a high-definition product. We'll continue to look into these claims and report any future developments. For now, back to the interview...



BDA Q&A

Niels Leibbrandt of the Blu-ray Disc Association covers the hot topics

Is the planet finally turning Blu?

We're seeing very positive growth world-wide. If you look at the figures, it's predicted that by the end of this year one in 10 homes will be Blu-ray-enabled, and by the end of next year, it should be 20 per cent of European homes. That's a great result.

Can BD survive the credit crunch?

Apparently it's on top of consumers' wish lists. If people are staying in they want to make it a better experience – an HDTV is one step, and then a hi-def source. BD is not the only form of HD you can get, but Europe has only six per cent penetration of HD broadcasting, so people are looking to Blu-ray.

Is BD-Live getting its act together?

It's certainly a very important element, it makes BD an interactive online platform. Both content owners and buyers are experimenting with it at the moment – in the coming years we'll see a huge amount of apps being launched. It's like the SMS function on mobile phones – in the beginning no-one knew what it was for.

Are other sources of hi-def a threat?

I think that several forms can co-exist, but BD is the benchmark in HD picture quality. The issue with downloading or streaming is one of quality, speed and convenience. It takes a huge amount of time to download an HD movie, and even when you get it, where do you store up to 50GB of information?

How long can it last?

We think it has a very long future. It's an innovative format which is pushing the specification, providing the highest quality on video and audio; and it has an interactive element. If you put that in the mix with the possibilities of 3D, I think we will see BD for many, many years to come.

Okay, moving on to something you can talk about – is there any part of the Blu-ray message that's proving difficult to get across to the public?

The thing we're trying to remind people is that Blu-ray decks play DVDs! There's a perception out there of, 'Oh, I'd like to get Blu-ray, but that means I have to replace my entire DVD collection'. For us it's really important that people know that Blu-ray players will spin your DVD collection – and even make them look better. There's a huge brand awareness for Blu-ray now, but some people still don't realise that it plays their DVDs.

You've spoken about US trends, what's your view on Blu-ray adoption in the UK and Europe?

Well, certain territories obviously perform better than others. For instance, Germany is doing really well with software and hardware sales – better than expected. France is doing okay, too. But in the UK there's been a lot of change of retailers and that's had an effect.

Blu-ray seems to have ongoing issues with its region-coding system. Each studio does its own thing, so perhaps it's no wonder the consumer gets confused. What's Sony Pictures' approach?

Ultimately it is each studio's decision, so I can't really talk for them or tell another company what to do. Sony released roughly around 100 titles last year and, I think, it was four of them that were actually region-coded. With region-coding, it's usually, to be quite frank, because we don't have the rights in certain territories...

As with *Punisher: War Zone* in the UK, which was a Lionsgate release in the US...

Exactly. We're not trying to have some kind of impact on the consumer experience. When you look at where DVD was, then four titles out of 100 is not really that many. I mean when it comes to something like *Terminator Salvation* for example, in the US its Warner Bros and so [region-coding] is more about a fair business practice.

Finally, is Sony Pictures' planning a Blu Christmas?

We think [Blu-ray] will be that key gift for the fourth quarter, now that the hardware pricing has come into alignment with the mass market, the PS3 has had a price-drop and the standalone players are at a competitive price point. And in addition to that, when you look at the software you'll see that there's a wide range of pricing, depending on whether it's a new release title, or a new-to-BD catalogue title. There are different variations now ●

Locked down: Unusually for Sony, the UK release of *Terminator Salvation* will be locked to Region B





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Home
Cinema
Heroes
No. 27

When Hollywood wants horror, it often turns to Stephen King, says **Mark Craven**



King of the chills

Log on to the Internet Movie Database and you'll see that the no.1 movie, as voted by nearly half a million users, is *The Shawshank Redemption*, a feelgood prison drama based on a short story from Stephen King. A good film, yes, but the best in the world? No chance – it's not even the best King adaptation.

Shawshank:
By far and away
King's biggest
critical success
– but not scary
at all!

The prolific horror scribbler has been churning out nightmarish tales since the mid-1970s, and almost all of them have been brought to the screen in one form or another. Of course, as you'd expect from an author who's written 40 novels (not to mention short stories, anthologies and stuff), King's work has its flaws – and the same is true of the cinematic versions. *The Shining* may be a *bona fide* horror masterpiece, but say the same about *Sometimes They Come Back* (1991), *The Mangler* (1995), or *Dreamcatcher* (2003) and you'll end up sectioned.

Indeed, it's a source of irritation for King's fans that some of his most outlandish, terrifying stories have stuttered on their way to the multiplex. Some don't even get that far. *It*, an enthralling, decade-spanning horror tale that clocked in at over 1,000 pages, ended

up as a disappointing TV movie starring Tim Curry as a murderous clown. Likewise *The Dark Half*, one of his better, more brutal horrors, ambled into cinemas as a rather humdrum flick made by George A. Romero during a zombie hiatus.

Often, the key to a good King movie adaptation seems to be a talented director – David Cronenberg, Brian de Palma and Frank Darabont have wrung quality flicks out of *The Dead Zone*, *Carrie* and *The Mist* stories respectively. Obviously a good director is a bonus for any production, but perhaps King's source material is more demanding than others; turning the chills from a page of text into real filmic fear is a job for the big boys.

Back from the dead

The good news for King-philes is that his influence in Hollywood shows no sign of diminishing. The quality of his literary output may have declined, but Tinseltown is smart enough to know a good idea when it sees one, and King's canon has plenty of 'em. We're at the stage now where new versions of the author's classic tales are being remade (*Pet Sematary* and *It* are both in development again), and it could be that the likes of *Carrie* and *Cujo* live on even when King himself has gone ●



Quintessential King... *Freakin' flying vampire kid in Salem's Lot*



1 Window pain

Young horror fan Mark Petrie is woken from his slumber by a scratching at his bedroom window



2 Let the wrong one in

Floating outside in an ethereal fog is his dead friend Danny Glick, who tries hypnotising Mark to let him in



3 Model behaviour

Thankfully, horror-buff Mark knows his vampire lore and makes a grab for a nearby Dracula model kit...



4 He'll be cross

...snapping off a cross-shaped tombstone and brandishing it at his vampiric former chum. Take that!

Must own...



Creepshow

Universal Pictures → Region 2 2-Disc Special Edition DVD → £20 Approx
King's love of short stories has given birth to plenty of portmanteau movies – none better than this 1982 classic. It's also the best thing George A. Romero has done outside of his ...of the Dead franchise.

02.45: The animated opening credits let you know *Creepshow* doesn't take itself too seriously – and points to its comic book inspiration.

20.22: Stephen King plays a redneck simpleton in his biggest acting role to date. Thankfully he stuck to writing.



Carrie

MGM → R2 Special Edition DVD £20 Approx
Brian de Palma's chilling adaptation of King's debut novel is aided by the superior but lean nature of the source material, and memorable turns from Sissy Spacek, Piper Laurie and a bucket of corn syrup.

09.55: The first appearance of Piper Laurie's wide-eyed religious mother from hell. Soon you'll be rooting for her to die!

72.32: Carrie's night out comes to a bad end, kicking in a scene of kinetic destruction that de Palma revels in.



The Mist

Momentum Pictures → Region B BD £25 Approx
In 2008, one of his short stories became the best King adaptation in 20 years, with Frank 'Shawshank' Darabont delivering a 1950s-style creature feature packed with thrills.

23.35: The top-notch AVC encode has the minor drawback of highlighting some less-than-special effects, such as this encounter with a CG tentacle.

57.04: The Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mix proves its worth as big flying bugs – and eventually something much worse – start to hassle the survivors.



The Shining

Warner Home Video → R2 2-Disc Special Edition DVD → £17 Approx
Stephen King famously didn't think much of Stanley Kubrick's attempt at adapting his snowbound hotel horror, but everyone else did. A hypnotic two hours of dread and steadicam.

11.38: A torrent of blood down a hotel corridor, flash cuts of ghostly twin girls. Kubrick doesn't wait long to crank up the chills.

123.36: 'Here's Johnny!' It probably wasn't in the original book, but this line of dialogue is, for many people, the most memorable moment in the film.

Worth seeing...



The Dead Zone

Sanctuary Visual Entertainment R2 Special Edition → £16 Approx
Another big-name director (in this case David Cronenberg) gets the best out of one of King's earlier works.

03.10: In this opening scene, Sanctuary's transfer shows signs of print damage. The accompanying 24-page booklet makes up for it.

54.45: Obviously lacking a shotgun, the Castle Rock killer (Nicholas Campbell) offs himself with a pair of scissors down his throat. Elements of this ghastly sequence were cut from the original UK release.



Christine

Sony Pictures → R2 Collector's Edition DVD → £13 Approx
In John Carpenter's brilliant follow up to *The Thing*, a possessed car exacts revenge on the bullies of its nerdy teenage owner.

04.51: George Thoroughgood and the Destroyers' *Bad to the Bone* opens the film as Christine rolls off a Detroit production line, leaving you in no doubt – in this picture, the car is the star.

93.30: Moochie's hit-and-run death is accompanied by a typical Carpenter-crafted electro score that has plenty of LF punch.



Pet Sematary

Paramount → Region 2 DVD £16 Approx
King's tale of dead animals – and humans – coming back from the grave is disturbing, gruesome stuff. In fact, it's still banned in Germany 20 years after its initial release.

43.24: Rachel's deformed dying sister was played by a male actor because the producers couldn't find a woman thin enough. The end result is creepy as hell.

87.01: The rear surround channels of this DD 5.1 mix don't get a lot of use, but here they echo with the murderous taunts of the reanimated toddler.



Cat's Eye

Momentum Pictures → R2 DVD £16 Approx
Another King anthology flick, with three tales linked by a mysterious cat. A tremendous disappointment – the best thing to say about it is that it's framed in 2.35:1.

00.54: In a self-referential opening, the stray cat is chased by Cujo and almost run over by Christine.

83.50: In the third tale's climatic fight, the heroic kitty kills a malevolent goblin (don't ask) by turning up the speed on a record player. This is more comedy than horror.



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INSTALLS

→ **Smarthome highlights** OPUS Simple-to-use multiroom controller
PHILIPS DYNALITE State-of-the-art touchscreen control DRAPER The giants of projector screens
unveil a new bespoke screen-making system IMAGINE THIS A contender for the UK's greatest
home cinema? CERTIFIED AV-HOLIC! An HCC reader guides you through his home theatre setup

Den of delights

Want your own cinema room but don't have a lot of space? Get some inspiration from this snug, six-seater, p50



Touchscreen, multiroom heaven

Fancy adding multiroom AV to your home entertainment? Opus is the everyman solution

The trick with any multiroom system is to offer seamless access to latest home entertainment technology via one intuitive touchscreen. You can then link to as many rooms as you see fit – adding extra speakers to pipe sound, and screens for visuals, as and when required.

It's what every boy (and presumably girl) wants, of course, but it isn't cheap and takes what could be seen as a relatively modest home cinema install (by CI standards) onto another level of installation expertise and, inevitably, expense.

It's here that British company Opus Technologies thinks it has found a niche – simplifying the installation and integration process, while keeping prices comparatively low.

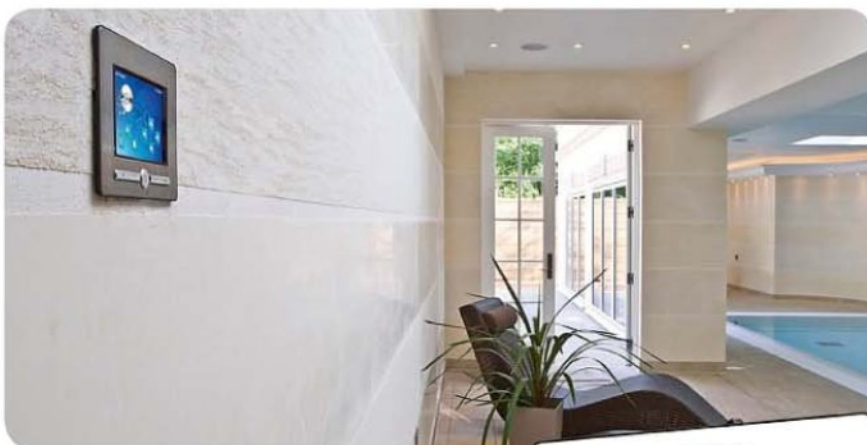
Key to its success is the company's ability to integrate and control a wide variety of entertainment and control products via Opus multiroom systems.

'We strongly believe there's a place for an affordable multiroom system that can deliver the latest tech that people are looking for,' Opus's Simon Hewitt told *HCC*. 'We definitely fill that void.'

The Opus 300 system is based around Cat5 and coaxial cabling, and delivers audio and video via a central hub. The hub serves up to eight rooms – four main and four 'sub' – which can even be daisy-chained to allow a single system to serve as many as 32 rooms.

Video is distributed by a video switching unit and a run of RG6/CT100 coaxial cable. Keypads and remotes provide control over the system, and in-ceiling speakers spread the sound. Of course, you'll need to invest in additional TVs if you want to watch movies while in bed or in the bath.

The higher-specced 500 series connects Opus' own Balanced Transmission Cable (BTC) to each



zone. The same number of rooms can be provided for as with the 300 series, but the 500 utilises Opus' innovative WCU600 touch-screen.

Launched last year, the WCU600 (around £560 each) recently added version 3.0 software, improving the versatility of the system and extending control to even more third-party automation systems (37 in total), including Rako, Clipsal and Lutron.

New Hotspot software allows control of a multitude of sources while still displaying the original onscreen GUI. Opus expects this to be a selling point for iPod and Apple TV users – who want control and iTunes access from anywhere in the home.

'The WCU600 is designed to integrate with the more cost-effective "must-have" technologies that have become part of people's lives,' explains Hewitt. 'This enables us to offer greater value.'

Check out www.opus.eu for further information



Good-looking: The WCU600 uses a 16-million colour 3.5in touchscreen

Touchscreen revolution



Philips Dynalite's DTP100 Revolution colour touchscreen could be set to mix things up a bit in

the CI universe. Designed to fit into a standard UK double gang wall box, the DTP100 allows users to create and display 'visually stunning' and easy-to-use control pages incorporating logos, buttons, faders, floor plans and diagnostic icons. Measuring just 5.7 x 9.5cm, the screen displays 480 x 272 resolution graphics with 16bit colour depth – providing superior visuals of the control pages. And with a tap on the LCD screen, you can execute simple or complicated conditional logic macros. Prices from your local installer.

Integrated control zone



DMi D&M Europe's Escient Zone is an integrated home-control platform intended for use with Marantz and Denon products. A single automation and control system for AV equipment, lighting, HVAC and security systems, the Zone provides media management and efficient programming, with auto-generated TV screen and touch-panel user interfaces. Being a two-way system, Zone can control external devices and systems – including lighting systems, Denon and Marantz AVRs and other RS232- and IP-controllable systems and devices – and receive status feedback. More details at www.dm-i.eu.

Hot or not?



The HeatingSave Home Controller is a simple-yet-intelligent British-designed heating control that

can show savings in excess of 30 per cent on gas or oil costs. Available from distributor direkt2U, key features include the ability to interface with leading CI controllers, including Pronto, Crestron and AMX, using the RS485 protocol. Additionally, it can be controlled and fully-monitored via a PC.

Costing around £400, the core of the system's functionality is four temperature probes, sensing boiler flow and return, your hot water tank – if you have one – and the outside temperature. This is all supported by room temperature and motion sensing.

Screen DIY



We all love kit that saves time and money – and projection screen

guru Draper may have delivered the goods with its new StageScreen system. This innovative projection screen allows you to build varying formats and sizes with different combinations of the same parts. As well as being flexible and modular, the StageScreen's 8in truss system is reassuringly rigid – even in larger sizes. The Truss segments attach quickly and easily, with no parts to unfold and no hinges to pinch fingers. Individual sections can be painlessly replaced if damaged. Pricing is dependant on requirements. Well worth getting a demo, we say.



X-Men Motion Picture © 2008 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation

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The ultimate home cinema?



HCC visits a home cinema system that mixes high-end kit with luxury touches

→Kit Checklist

Runco: VX22D projector with McKinley Autoscope lens
Screen Research: 140in XMask 235 Theatre curve acoustically-transparent screen
Procella: 3 x P8 LCR speakers
Procella: 4 x P6 surround speakers
Procella: 1 x P18 subwoofer
Audio Control: Concert AVR1 processor
Audio Control: Avalon two-channel power amp
Audio Control: Pantages five-channel power amp
Sherbourn: C12 cooling unit
Niveus: Pro N4 Blu-ray server
Fortress: 6 x Matinee cinema seats
Lighting control by Detailed lighting and Lutron, Mid Atlantic Rack, Phillips pronto

The owner of this impressive home theatre knew exactly what he wanted when he approached installers Imagine This. Requirements included a dedicated bar area, six cinema chairs, the biggest screen possible and 'plasma-like' image quality. Other must-haves included easy access to his existing library of DVDs, control from only one remote, Sky TV, and hook up to the kids' beloved Nintendo Wii.

Imagine This duly went to work, and, in collaboration with UK kit distributor Pulse Marketing, specced components from high-end brands including Procella, Sherbourn, AudioControl and Niveus. In particular, the 7 x 200W amplification, THX-certified 140in screen and Runco Cinewide projector combine to deliver real cinema-grade performance. We're not privy to how much was spent on the AV electronics, but it's safe to guesstimate that it was a fair few quid.

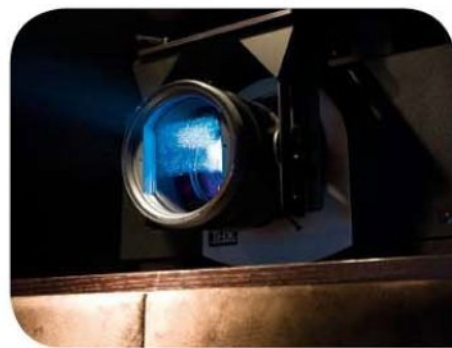
What is particularly nice about the room, beyond the quality AV performance, is the simplicity of control and finishing touches. All six of the cinema seats are fully-reclinable, and sport D-Box Motion control tech for the owner to upgrade to later; the Philips Pronto touchscreen handset can activate everything from the anamorphic lens attachment to the cinema's red curtain and lighting system; and the acoustic room treatments help, rather than hinder, the sumptuous decor.

The owner, of course, is extremely pleased with the finished room: 'Every time I press the button and relax to watch a film, it feels like the first time. I'm delighted with the results,' he told *HCC*.

Each of the Fortress chairs is fully-reclinable for real laid-back movie-watching



48 INSTALL



A Get, sled, go!

When 2.35:1 movies are the order of the day, the anamorphic lens slides into place at the touch of a button

B HDTV on tap

Nearly every pro-install we see features a Sky+HD box – maybe next year it'll be Freeview HD, too

C Gamesworld

Both a Sony PlayStation 3 and a Nintendo Wii have a place in the Mid Atlantic kit rack

D Service!

This Niveus Pro N4 Blu-ray server is the real heart of the cinema, combining a BD/DVD/CD deck with 1TB of storage, gold-plated outputs and Intel Core 2 Duo processing to handle the interface

E Temporary tech

Because the cinema was finished before the HD-audio-capable Concert AVR1 arrived, a Maestro M2 Dolby/DTS processor was loaned to the owner so he could start enjoying the finished room immediately

F Prince of processing

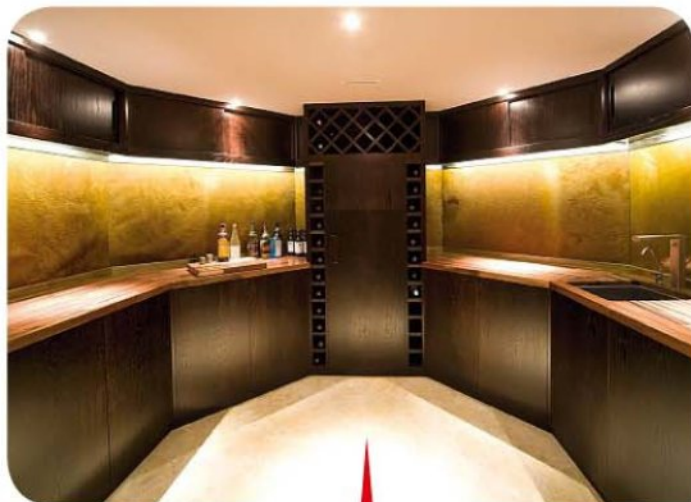
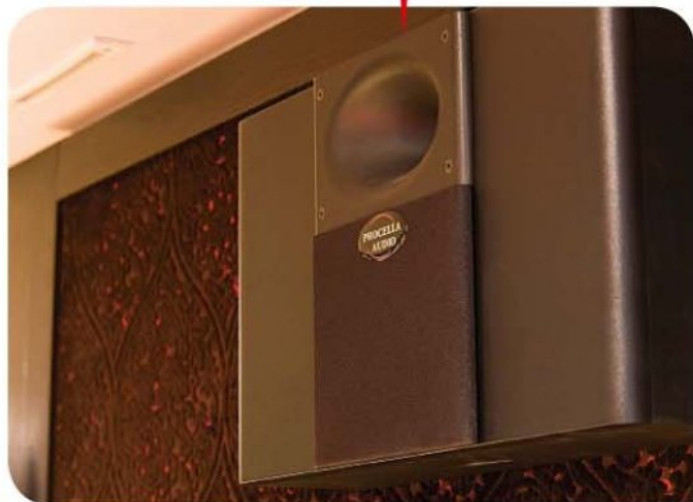
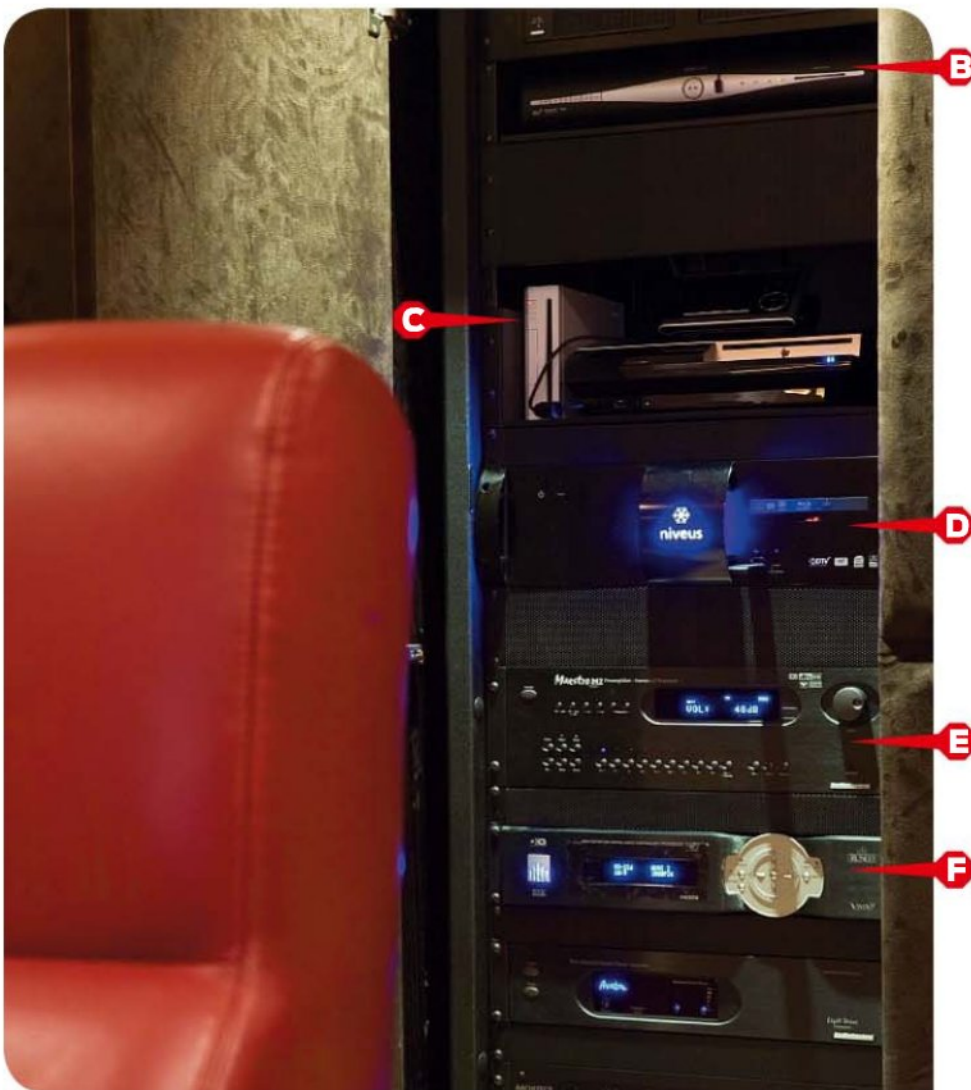
This DHD Digital Controller from Runco uses ViViX II wizardry to polish digital and analogue signals to 'near hi-def quality' before they reach the projector. It also outputs three 12V DC trigger signals – one of which is used to activate the anamorphic sled

G Pro audio

The 7.1 system is made entirely of Procella speakers. These rear surrounds are the brand's P6 model

H Thirsty work

A fully-fitted kitchen/bar area with hidden fridge is located off the rear of the cinema room. Ice cold beer and a Blu-ray? Perfect!



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Den of delights

Anton van Beek reports on a snug home cinema with a grand view

PICTURES COURTESY OF WWW.HOMEAUTOMATIONPHOTOGRAPHY.COM



Sometimes all it takes is to see a real home cinema in action. The owner of this compact hi-def den had previously visited the show house of installer Finite Solutions, and was so impressed with what he saw that he came to the company requesting exactly the

same concept be fitted into an open space on the ground floor of his home. However, as is often the case, there was one caveat – the dedicated cinema room would have to be on a notably smaller scale, as the space was to be split up to also include a recreation and bar area.

Undaunted, the install team created CG renders to illustrate to the owner what could be achieved, and these quickly met with his approval.

The driving force of the system is a DF Media Server. This not only allows DVD access in the cinema, but lets the owner listen to his CDs when he's



→ Kit Checklist

Grandview: 90in 16:9 acoustically transparent projector screen
InFocus: IN82 1080p DLP projector
Arcam: DiVA AVR350 7 x 100W-per channel home cinema receiver
DF Solutions: The Base Media Server
Sky+ HD: Hi-def set-top box
Sony: PlayStation3 games console
Bowers & Wilkins: 3x CWM LCR7 three-way in-wall loudspeakers
Bowers & Wilkins: 4x CCM65 in-ceiling loudspeakers
REL: R-305 sub-bass system with 300W amplifier
Philips: Pronto Professional TSU9600 remote control
Rako: Three-circuit lighting system
CineLounge: Electric reclining seating

in the neighbouring bar. A Sky+ HD box and a PlayStation 3 console are also included for native HD content. All of this is linked into a full 7.1-channel speaker system (incorporating B&W and REL models) and an InFocus 1080p DLP projector.

The project also uses integrated Rako mood lighting (with various presets accessible from the Philips Pronto remote) and a six-camera CCTV system focused on the perimeter of the property – the latter can be viewed in the cinema or on a Samsung TV in the adjoining bar ●

Room essentials

A Front of house

The 90in Grandview acoustically-transparent screen hides the B&W frontstage speakers

B Mood lighting

Simple touches, like the up-lighters fitted into the walls, add a touch of finesse to the room

C Hi-def hero

Given the hi-def sources, the system demanded a 1080p projector that could get the very best from them

D Up, up and away

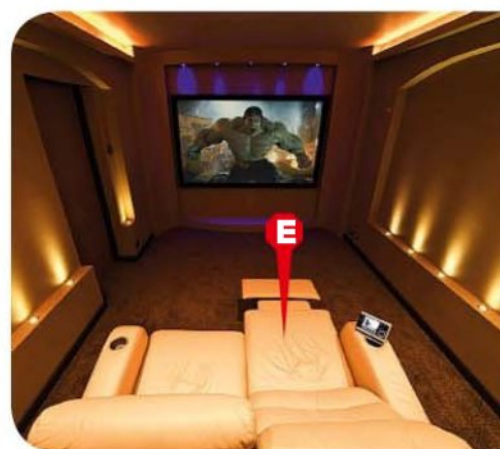
In a small room like this, where floorspace is at a premium, in-ceiling speakers are a good surround sound solution

E Sit back and enjoy

No dedicated theatre is complete without luxury seating!

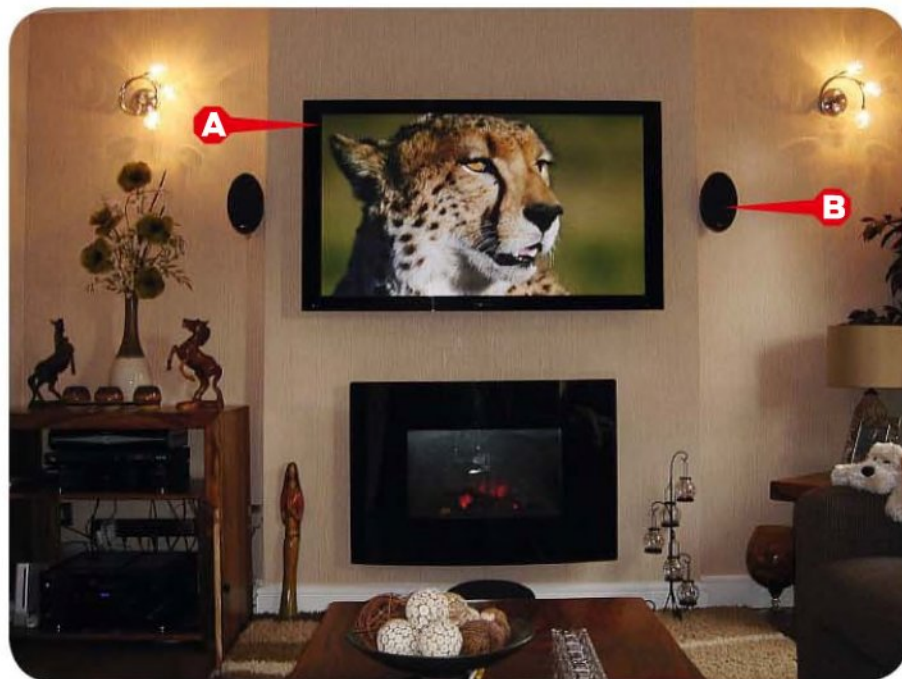
F Golden oldie

This former Arcam flagship AVR still performs well, but lacks DTS-HD and Dolby TrueHD decoding



Certified: AV-holic!

Every issue, one **AV-holic** invites you to take a tour of their beloved home cinema setup...



Happily settled:
Our AV-holic doesn't think he'll upgrade his system for 3D anytime soon

Introduce yourself...

Andy Audsley, I'm 43 years old and I'm a self-employed joiner.

How did you become an AV-holic?

My interest started when I was a teenager – my brother always had good hi-fi – and over the years I've had many pieces of kit. Since buying a house twelve years ago I've diversified into home cinema.

I also play keyboards in a band so audio has been important to me. Luckily my KEF 3005SE speakers are great for music and surround sound. Very powerful and clean-sounding, combined with wife-pleasing looks. I also have a few SACDs that play through the Oppo DV-981HD. But my best thing has to be my Pioneer KRP500M plasma. The picture is fantastic, blacks are really deep, and Blu-rays look stunning. It's the best TV I've ever owned.

What's in your cinema setup?

The aforementioned Pioneer plasma, Oppo player and KEF

system, plus a Pioneer BDP-320 BD deck, Sky+HD box, Nintendo Wii console, QED HDMI and speaker cables and a Tacima CS929 mains conditioner.

What's your newest buy?

The Pioneer Blu-ray player. I've just upgraded from a Panasonic DMP-BD30. I wasn't sure if I would see much of a difference but after a demo I was convinced. The picture is sharper with more colour depth.

And what's next?

Mmm, not sure. I'm quite happy with everything at the moment.

How much have you spent on your hobby over the years?

God knows. Certainly, over the last three years, about £5K.

What's your current fave disc?

I still love *King Kong* (Blu ray).

Are you excited about 3D?

Not really. I'm not sure it will take off. Having to buy completely new kit is of no interest to me at all. I'm really happy with my setup at the moment so I won't be buying in to 3D anytime soon ●

Room essentials

A Pride of place

The Pioneer Kuro has recently been moved from a table-top stand to this wall-mounted position above the fireplace. Better hope the heat doesn't warp the bezel...

B Volume junkie

Apparently, our AV-holic's wife has only one complaint about his hobby: 'She says I play everything far too loud.'

C Music maestro

Andy is a keen musician, and uses his 5.1 system to listen to hi-res platters – including DVD-Audios, Super Audio CDs and DTS 5.1 music DVDs

D Substitute

This Pioneer BDP-320 has replaced an earlier Panasonic Blu-ray deck, and made a noticeable AV difference

Join the club

Do you want to see your home cinema system featured in the pages of *Home Cinema Choice*? If so, just email your contact info and some large, hi-res photos of your setup to hcc@futurenet.co.uk with AV-Holic as the subject.

"The 10.1s take Wharfedale back to the forefront
of budget speakers. Truly excellent"
– What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision (September 2009)

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September 2009

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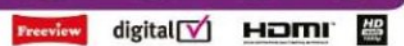
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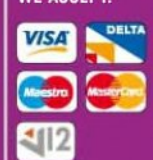
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REVIEWS

→ **Hardware highlights** **PIONEER** Much-anticipated sequel to a flagship AVR
ACOUSTIC ENERGY Full-range 5.1 cinema system **PANASONIC** The world's most advanced
 DVD recorder **JVC** Custom install-friendly 42in LCD monitor **OPPO** Universal BD spinner
LG ISF-certified Full HD TV **BLU-RAY MEGATEST** Four entry-level decks battle it out **AND MORE!**



Aural assault

Definitive Technology wants to gatecrash the high-end soundbar party with its Mythos SSA-42 system. Turn to p78 to find out if it's succeeded

HCC Ratings key

| | |
|---------------|-----------|
| Outstanding | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Above average | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Acceptable | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Disappointing | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Dire | 1 2 3 4 5 |

HCC DOESN'T BELIEVE IN OVER-PRISING HARDWARE. CONSEQUENTLY, A THREE-STAR RATING SHOULDN'T BE CONSIDERED A BAD RESULT, IT SIMPLY MEANS THAT A PRODUCT PERFORMS ACCORDING TO ITS CATEGORY POSITION. A FIVE-STAR RATING IS ONLY AWARDED IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Ice, Ice baby

A joyous **Richard Stevenson** rekindles his relationship with Pioneer's digital AVR technology



It was only earlier this year when I fell in love with Pioneer's ICEpower-fuelled SC-LX81. It was great-sounding, packed with features, relatively affordable and looked like a piece of modern art on the equipment rack. Unsurprisingly, it scooped the top amplifier gong at the 2009 HCC Best Buy awards. But good R&D never sleeps – which is more than can be said for many of the Awards attendees the day after the event.

Enter Pioneer's new SC-LX82. A radical upgrade with major updates, additional power, more features and extra pixie-dust – the LX82 certainly is not. In fact, the only obvious thing to change from the outside is the number on the badge and the addition of a front-mounted HDMI input. Around the back the differences are only marginally more noticeable: one of the LX81's two AV in/out loops for a video recorder has been replaced in favour of Zone 2 and Zone 3 AV outputs; and gone is the phono-stage altogether. I would say the latter was a sign of the times – had the vinyl market not been growing steadily for the last two years.

But let's not decry the solid foundation upon which the SC-LX82 is built. This is a THX Ultra2 Plus-specified amplifier with all the usual THX post-processing refinements. It boasts sonic tuning in the UK by AIR Studios and has Pioneer's PQLS system for reclocking the multichannel audio signal over HDMI to reduce jitter with suitable (i.e. certain Pioneer) Blu-ray players. The SC-LX82 also comes fitted with Pioneer's rather lush and accurate MCACC Room EQ system. Not only does this function handle all your setup and basic EQ functions, it incorporates a clever trickery to fine-tune your room's standing waves,

Incredible hulk:
The SC-LX82 is 20cm high and weighs over 18kg

phase anomalies and reverb – the results of which are neatly displayed onscreen or exported to the MCACC software on your PC if you wish.

The MCACC system takes up a fair chunk of the gigantic manual and much of the best bits of Pioneer's GUI. Time may have made me over-familiar with this particular GUI, and I now find it quite reserved in comparison to some of the prettier interfaces. It's also slightly frustrating that not all features are accessed from a single main menu in-road. For example, MCACC and system set-up is accessed through the main menu, but the audio parameters, video controls and internet radio menus are all accessed with different keys on the remote. I'm sure once you have used the LX82 for a while it won't be an issue – but it seems to be unnecessarily complex in this respect.

Ice to see you

In case the growing cornucopia of cracking Blu-ray releases has kept you from following all that is moving and shaking in home cinema,

Pioneer took a bold step in introducing ICEpower modules into the elite, performance-driven end of the AV market last year.

These are digital Class-D amplifier modules developed by Bang & Olufsen, which have been widely adopted for AV amps and subwoofers due to their high power output, low current draw and incredibly linear output. Some implementations have been dire and some have been outstanding – Pioneer's offerings falling firmly into the latter category.

Supported by Pioneer's own substantial power supply, the sound is clean, potent and wonderfully crisp without harshness. Bass digs



→ Specifications

Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES plus Digital, Digital Plus, EX and Pro Logic II/IIx
DTS-HD Master Audio: YES plus DTS, DTS+, ES, Neo:6, DTS 96/24, DTS Express, DTS-HD High Resolution
THX: YES THX Ultra2 Plus
Multichannel audio: YES 7 x 190W amplifiers
Multichannel input: YES 7.1 phono
Multiroom: YES main plus two zones
AV inputs: YES 7 x S-video & composite; 9 x digital audio (3 x coaxial, 6 x optical (2 outs))
HDMI input/output: YES 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Video upscaling: YES to 1080p
Component: YES 3-in, 2-out (1 for Zone 2)
Dimensions: 420(w) x 459(d) x 200(h) mm **Weight:** 18.5kg
Features: Ethernet; DLNA certified; full band phase control; AIR Studios tuning; ICEpower amplifiers; Kuro-Link connection; Neural THX Surround; Front L/R bi-amp; X-Curve control; PQLS audio link over HDMI; Advanced MCACC RoomEQ; FM/AM tuner; USB input; RS232 port

AV/CV

Product:
Ultra-stylish, well-equipped, all-digital AV receiver

Positioning:
Replaces the LX81 near the top of Pioneer's eight-strong multichannel AVR range, just below the flagship Susano

Peers:
Denon AVR-4310; Onkyo TX-NR5007; Yamaha DSP-Z7

Most of the Pioneer's legends, including the THX Ultra2 Plus badge, are on the top of the unit. Boo!



60 REVIEWS

deep without any bloom or excess, and low-bass to the main channels leaps positively gazelle-like out of the speakers.

Much of this cleanliness is due in no small way to the MCACC EQ system doing its thing. Set up in 'Full-Auto' mode (which is a wonderful phrase that follows 'Uzi nine-millimetre' in an Austrian accent so well...), the LX82 managed a very-close-to-verbatim set of room measurements to the LX81. Whether the small discrepancies were down to the extra 30-or-so Blu-ray platters on the shelf since February or the extra Summer-holiday muffin around my waistline is a moot point – because it still sounds superb.

With Pioneer's AVR taking the reins, the breathtaking carnival scene in the Blu-ray release of *Ghost In The Shell 2: Innocence* simply explodes out of the speakers with amazing projection and clarity – although initially the sound feels a little forward because the Pioneer has

stripped away so much mid-range bloom and bass thickness.

The high-pitched massed choral singing of *Gits'* soundtrack is rendered every bit as eerie and captivating as the film's video content, while the sonic ambience of the tall cityscape in which the procession marches is tangible.

When the bass drum kicks in, the punch and speed of attack is superb; there isn't

a hint of over-egging the LF to add artificial weight to the sound, although the sheer pace puts an incredible demand on the main speakers and the subwoofer. If you own an old-school small driver/ported cabinet sub, the SC-LX82 will eat it alive.

With movies of a more gung-ho nature (with no mentions of Confucius), I found the Pioneer can sound just a little bit reserved compared to some of the more spunky amplifiers out there. Big explosions are incredibly detailed



and perhaps the most accurately rendered of the sub £2K amplifier bunch, but there are times when you need a film's soundtrack to bypass all pretences of sophistication, grab you by the cajones and drag you along for a joyride. The LX82 gets oh-so-close to this excitement level, but I can't help thinking the Pioneer's idea of a joyride is more *Gran*

Hidden talents: Behind the pull-down flap is an extra HDMI input and a USB port

Connections

A Digital delight

With four HDMI inputs and two outputs on the rear, hooking up the LX82 should pose no problems. There's also a front-mounted HDMI slot for quick access

B System control

Use these 12V triggers to wire the AVR to your projector or electric screen for automated control

C Getting out and about

The LX82 can cater for up to two further zones, by composite video or component, and analogue stereo outs or the surround back speaker terminals

D Leave your legacy

While people still use S-video and composite for connecting old AV kit, we think most will struggle to make use of this comprehensive selection

E Multichannel music

There's little chance these phono inputs will get much use from Blu-ray decks – you're more likely to bitstream HD movie soundtracks over HDMI and let the LX82 handle the decoding. Save these for your SACD player, then

F What no Earth?

This two-pin mains socket lacks an Earth pin, indicating the Pioneer is double-insulated. So now you know



Tourismo than *Grand Theft Auto*.

That said, it is chaos-filled action-packed scenes where the LX82's resolution really comes into its own. It conveys every last sonic detail the director intended. I noticed this trait with the LX81 through the dock battle scene in *Matrix Revolutions* (Blu-ray) and the LX82 is every bit as electrifying. Again, the rush of the Squidies and the APU's heavy machine guns are delivered with astonishing transient power. The blast of each shot is picked out in a maelstrom of aural armageddon. Whack up the volume and the room simply fills with sculpted sonic chaos.

The beast does quiet scenes just as well and dialogue projects out with all the emotion and inflection that the actors can muster. The gruff baritone voice of Batou in *GitS* is perhaps not quite as deep or fulsome as some of the competitor's AV receivers, but it is remarkably precise and accurate. In fact, that dichotomy sums up the sound of the LX82.

While it doesn't have the warmth or sheer mid-bass body of some of its competitors, this perceived lack of 'richness' lets the rest of the sound breathe like never before.

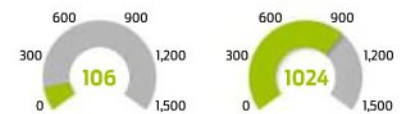
Tough competition

Of course, all this is close to precisely what I said of the SC-LX81, because it and the LX82 are essentially one and the same thing. Another barn-storming, award-winning Best Buy product for sure then? Not necessarily...

Pioneer's peers, you see, have moved on. Most now come with two remote controls so you have a spare one to let loose in Zone 2, and many have added new features such as Dolby ProLogic IIz, Audyssey DSX and, in Onkyo's case, an extra two channels of power to make the most of both new formats. The SC-LX82 is still a great act and you will not be disappointed with its performance, but it simply isn't as far ahead of the £2K competition as its forebear.

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



Idling:
Not an unusual idling power consumption for an AVR of this specification

Powered:
In five-channel mode, this is about the consumption we would expect, and points to good efficiency

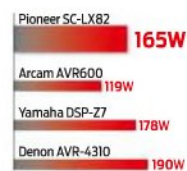
Power ratings: Watts (8Ω, 0.5% THD)



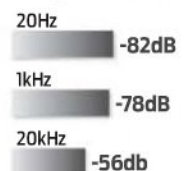
2-channel 8Ω:
Our Tech Labs measured 195W into 8Ω in stereo mode – which is above the rated spec

5-channel 8Ω:
An excellent multichannel performance near enough to Pioneer's stated figure of 190W

Untainted: Watts



Signal/noise: dB



Fidelity firewall:

A measurement of power untainted by distortion (0.045 THD, 8Ω, 1kHz), this is a huge figure; its predecessor, LX81, offered 145W

S/N tests: Very good

results at low and mid frequencies, fairly good at higher frequencies



HCC VERDICT

Pioneer SC-LX82
£1,900 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Punchy, highly detailed sound; brilliant features; looks fabulous
Lows: No DPL IIz or Audyssey DSX; no second remote; competition is getting tougher

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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of the Radiance
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to make a 7.1 array

Acoustic Energy's woodwork class

The British speaker brand tries out some new shapes with its tapering timber towers. **Jim Hill** welcomes the move



Acoustic Energy launched in the 1980s with a classic bookshelf speaker, the celebrated AE1, that is still selling very well today. It's a traditional two-way design with one tweeter above one mid-bass driver. With its metal cones it was technically quite cutting-edge, but looked much like the standard cabinet – and that's pretty much how AE's speakers have turned out ever since. Smart, decent quality, but rather generic. Thankfully, with the Radiance lineup, AE is using its 25 years' of knowledge of traditional wooden cabinets and alloy drive units, and transplanting it into some attractively tapered boxes.

It's not just the curved enclosure that's new; AE has spent three years developing the Radiance series and says that it's the company's most radical rethink so far. So what, exactly, has the Cirencester-based design team come up with?

Top of the range

The Radiance range includes some middle-of-the-road two-way floorstanders called Radiance Two, but our 5.1 configuration is comprised of the flagship three-way Radiance Three towers, a very substantial centre channel and a pair of fairly chunky bookshelf speakers for the rears. A front-firing active subwoofer takes care of the very low end. All the cabinets are made from 15mm MDF

AV/CV

Product: Full-range 5.1 speaker system with three-way front towers

Position: This is the premium configuration of AE's flagship cinema speakers

Peers: Tannoy Signature Revolution 5.1

panels with a carefully applied and not unattractive real wood veneer. As usual, you can choose your finish to suit your furniture.

That's assuming you still have room for any – these cabinets are pretty large. The massive front speakers (almost a metre high) come with wide outrigger platform bases that stand on spiked feet. They look a bit like corrective shoes, but the combined weight of the cabinet and base acts as an effective anchor.

The size advantage also means there's ample room within the enclosure to generate a hearty low-end. You can further tune the cabinets by blocking, or obscuring, the rear ports. There are three of these on each of the Radiance Threes – one for each internal compartment. Push them back against the wall to load the bass, or pull them forwards if it's already booming. Meanwhile, the curved shape of the enclosure avoids the build up of interior standing waves, so between them, you already get a powerful and throaty sound from the front.

Add in the big, rounded centre channel and you have quite an intimidating front soundstage, with an arsenal of metal dome tweeters pointing at you. To get the best performance from it, you'll need a rigid speaker stand to keep the centre speaker in line with the front pair. The

rears can be wall mounted if you can find a sturdy enough bracket, while the squat sub can lurk anywhere in the room.

Big boxes like the Radiance series usually require big amplification, but these are actually quite sensitive at 88dB and 90dB, and a moderately powerful Marantz SR-6003 proved enough to drive them pretty hard. **I got the best results by using the spare pair of amplifiers in the Marantz to bi-amp the two Radiance Threes** and give them an additional energy boost. In fact, tri-wiring is an option if you care to add another stereo amplifier. With the extra power and a feisty surround soundtrack (in this case the 5.1 DTS-HD Master Audio mix on the *Valkyrie* Blu-ray disc) these speakers can really come to life.

High-frequency stunner

You might expect the bass to be a little overwhelming in a modestly-sized room (especially with the subwoofer set to stun), but it's the biting treble that actually makes the bigger impact. This clarity in the high frequencies is a real advantage with dialogue, and the Radiance Centre delivers astonishingly crisp vocals through the confusion of the noisy but brief battle scene in Chapter Two of the *Valkyrie* disc. The accurate top-end also nicely punctuates the



Metal mayhem:

The rigid aluminium dome drivers help deliver a clean, revealing sound

artillery fire as it zips across the soundstage. In fact, this scene has some of the best surround steering I've come across, and if the Radiance rears didn't tonally match the front three speakers, the handover of effects wouldn't work nearly as well as it does here.

The mid-band sounds spacious, too; you'll notice this with the crisp echo of Tom Cruise's jack boots marching along corridors. The AEs convey a good sense of the interior ambiances.

Bass matters

The five Radiance speakers work well as a team to provide a surprisingly punchy and dynamic sound on all sides, while the subwoofer does a reasonable job with the bass channel. If there is a weak link though, it's the sub, which leaves the bottom-end sounding slightly underwhelming given the amount of sound system in the room.

Swapping movies for music for a moment reveals that the Radiance Threes already generate a very wide dynamic range,

reaching right down to 27Hz in stereo mode without the need for a sub. The front pair on their own put in a rousing musical two-channel performance; given Neil Young's live *Road Rock* DVD-Audio disc, which has both stereo and 5.1 mixes, it's the

stereo track that impresses the most. It sounds just as open and creates a perfect stereo image in front. Neil's nasal tones are clear and you can hear every scratch of his fingers on the guitar strings.

What's more, the rear speakers, which are often sold as a stereo pair in a hi-fi setup, sound equally musical when I experimented with wiring these up at the front. So in a surround setup you'll really benefit from their sensitivity to fine detail and excellent handling of musical scores.

It seems, then, that what the Radiance collective does best is put forward a clean and revealing sound that's actually much leaner than their stable mates at Acoustic Energy, the Aelites (see *HCC* #151). While the more affordable Aelite speakers produced a lush warm sound from their equally large wooden cabinets, their soft dome tweeters are no match for the crunchingly accurate alloy tweeters of the Radiance crew.

My advice would be to audition the Radiance range if you prefer a more revealing sound as opposed to a warmer, more bass-driven tone and make sure you have plenty of room to move these speakers around as their placement is critical. Partnered with a decent and fairly powerful amp, these hefty pieces of wood will drive a big cinema room effortlessly, and without missing the fine detail ●

→ Specifications

Radiance Three (fronts)

Drive Units: 1 x 1.5in HF unit; 1 x 5in MF unit; 2 x 6.25in LF unit
Frequency Response: 40Hz-45kHz (+/-3dB)
Sensitivity: 90dB
Power Handling: 200W
Dimensions: 230(w) x 920(h) x 297(d) mm
Weight: 18kg

Radiance One (surrounds)

Drive Units: 1 x 1.5in HF unit; 1 x 5in LF unit
Frequency Response: 50Hz-45kHz (+/-3dB)
Sensitivity: 88dB
Power Handling: 150W
Dimensions: 185(w) x 320(h) x 250(d) mm
Weight: 8kg

Radiance Centre

Drive Units: 1 x 1.5in HF unit; 2 x 5in MF/LF units
Frequency Response: 55Hz-45kHz (+/-3dB)
Sensitivity: 88dB
Power Handling: 150W
Dimensions: 450(w) x 180(h) x 297(d) mm
Weight: 8kg

Radiance Sub

Drive Units: 8.5in pulp cone
Frequency Response: 35Hz-150kHz
Onboard power: 200W
Power Handling: 200W RMS
Dimensions: 360 (w) x 410 (h) x 325 (d)
Weight: 17kg
Features: Variable phase, notch filter



HCC VERDICT

Acoustic Energy Radiance
 £3,000 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Huge scale and volume; plenty of treble detail; ample bass weight from the front speakers

Lows: Subwoofer is a little lacklustre; could be a more open mid-range

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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JVC heads for higher ground

A 42in screen costing two grand? **John Archer** finds out if JVC's 42WX70 is sheer madness or a high-end user's dream screen



It's a brave company indeed that's willing to flog a 42in TV for two thousand pounds these days. Especially when the company doing the flogging, JVC, is not a brand usually associated with the premium end of the LCD market.

It doesn't take much exploration of the LT-42WX70's background, though, to start to understand where JVC is coming from. It turns out that it's targeted for the most part at the price-insensitive (within reason!) custom install market – a channel opened up to JVC by the success of its D-ILA projectors.

Ambitious screen

Of course, targeting a premium means of distribution isn't enough in itself to justify a £2K tag on a 42in telly. Thankfully, **the 42WX70 is JVC's most ambitious and feature-laden LCD TV yet.**

The top-line stuff begins as soon as you get the TV out of its box and clock its striking, slender design. This comprises a bezel as narrow as something you might find around a 19in TV, and a rear end that sticks out barely half as far as a typical LCD.

I personally also like the bezel's unusual matte, textured finish, which looks like leather in the right light.

There's one rather strange thing about the 42WX70's styling, though: its desktop stand. Instead of simply slotting on to a simple, short-necked 'foot', the JVC actually has to be bolted to a large pole that holds

the TV some distance clear of the foot support.

The reason for this gap between the screen and stand is that JVC has visions of you filling it with one of its promised external set-top-box options. Because the 42WX70's svelte body doesn't house any sort of tuner, some sort of external receiver will need to be added to the system if you want to turn the screen into a TV. Hence JVC's big, custom install-friendly idea of offering a series of different external boxes, sleekly designed to look like they're part of the TV's stand.

This approach will give buyers the chance to effectively upgrade their WX70 as new external options become available, and make buying it feel like a bespoke experience.

The first box that was initially stated to be in the pipeline was the CX100: a solution containing HD digital terrestrial and analogue tuners. But worryingly, despite being mentioned on the original press release and appearing on the original 42WX70 microsite, JVC now tells us that this unit will no longer appear.

Other options containing hard disk recorders, DVD players, Blu-ray players and even Freesat tuners are still supposedly being planned. But the shelving of the first tuner box and JVC's reluctance to give us a date on any future launches make me wonder how serious the brand is about supporting this key aspect of the WX70 proposal. Oh well – I guess

AV/CV

Product:

A slim-profile 42in LCD screen with wide colour gamut features and a custom install sensibility

Position:

Currently JVC's flagship screen. An ultra-slim LED-based WX50 sibling is due soon, also with a custom install focus

Peers:

Sony 40ZX1;
LG 42SL8000;
Samsung
UE40B8000

I'll just have to take JVC's word on it for now, and move on.

Given the current lack of external options, it's good to find the 42WX70 touting a solid set of connections – including three HDMI and a component-capable PC port – meaning you can get the screen up and running with your existing sources as soon as possible.

A helping hand

I suspect some justification for the 42WX70's positioning comes from the fact that each and every screen is hand-calibrated to the video-friendly 2.2 gamma level before it leaves JVC's manufacturing plant. Furthermore, its wide colour gamut LCD panel is designed to produce a claimed 100 per cent of the sRGB/HDTV colour space, along with 96 per cent of the Adobe RGB colour space. Serious digital photographers will find this feature appealing, as it enables the JVC to reproduce SLR photography with unprecedented accuracy for a flatscreen TV.

Delve into the 42WX70's extensive and serious-looking onscreen menus, and you'll find a number of features that should broaden its custom install appeal. These include gamma and white balance fine tuners, and a colour management system that's far more sophisticated than anything found on most normal HDTVs.

The 42WX70's key specifications, meanwhile, are promising. It's a Full HD panel driven by JVC's usually

→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES including 1080p/24
Progressive scan: YES NTSC and PAL
Digital TV tuner: NO and no external
 STB available, either
Scart: NO that's sooo 2008
Component video: YES via supplied
 VGA adaptor
HDMI: YES 3 v1.3 inputs
PC Input: YES 1 D-Sub input
Sound: 2 x 10W
Resolution: 1,920 x 1,080
Brightness: 450cd/m²
Contrast ratio: 50,000:1 (claimed)
Dimensions: 990(w) x 599.7(h) x
 42.5(d)mm **Weight:** 13.2kg (12.0kg
 without speaker)
Features: 100/120Hz processing;
 DynaPix HD processing; MPEG
 noise reduction; wide colour
 gamut inc 96% of Adobe RGB;
 extensive colour management;
 ultra-thin screen; 36-bit colour
 processing (12 x R, G, B)



The WX70 ships with a detachable soundbar



impressive 100/120Hz Clear Motion Drive II and DynaPix HD processing systems. Also of note is the application of 12bit processing to each of the red, green and blue components of the image.

And in many ways, the 42WX70 delivers a premium picture performance worthy of any viewing room. Colours are spectacular; partly because they explode off the screen with exceptional intensity during colour-rich games like *Viva Pinata*, or flamboyant Blu-rays like *Australia* and the *Rome* box-set, but more because they are exquisitely expressive, thanks to subtle tonal shifts and the sheer range of hues the set can display. This helps the image look extremely natural.

Hours spent playing the continually dark *Batman: Arkham Asylum* on the 42WX70, not to mention dark film scenes like the finale of *Gran Torino*, reveal an excellent black level. As good as anything I've seen outside of the LED/plasma worlds. This is backed up by our Tech Labs' measurement of a 35,000:1 contrast ratio in dynamic mode.

When you tire of Blu-ray and HD games, JVC's DynaPix HD manages to inject extra detail and sharpness into standard-definition sources. It does this without generating much in the way of nasty side effects, too. In fact, it's hard to think of any brand other than, perhaps, Philips, which can rival JVC in this key aspect.

On the move

This brings me, however, to the 42WX70's Achilles Heel. Unfortunately, the exceptional sharpness I've been eulogising tends to diminish whenever there's lots of motion in a picture— that old LCD problem of motion blur is back, apparently.

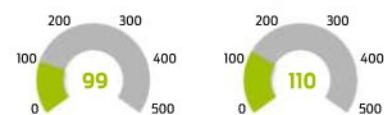
For example, a recent international cricket match offered players leaving slight trails behind them as they ran about the pitch, and facial close-ups frequently prone to blurring and lag. Similar problems sometimes crop up with films, too — even hi-def ones. Activating the 100Hz engine didn't really help matters, either. In fact, I felt it possibly made pictures look worse.

Turning to the 42WX70's audio, no speakers are built into the 42WX70's body. JVC clearly expects that the screen will be partnered with a separate sound system. But it does ship with a separate speaker bar that bolts onto the bottom and proved capable during my audition of a punchy, clean soundstage that was only a little bass short of excellence.

JVC has clearly tried very hard to **tailor the 42WX70 to the demanding custom install market**, especially if its external box options ever materialise, and some of its innovations make a genuine impact on its picture quality, too. For me, though, this ultimately just makes the screen's susceptibility to one of LCD's oldest problems all the more irritating ●

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White Screen: Average power consumption for a set this size. Eco Mode reduces consumption by 20W in dim lighting

Powered: Not an enormous difference in full-motion playback, but that extra 10W indicates the speakers are doing something

TV Contrast: ratio



Picture: Measured contrast ratio in Dynamic mode comes close to the claim, and luminance is high at 85.73fl. In standard mode contrast measures 6,074:1

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: A good range of CT presets includes an acceptable Warm 1; manual R/G/B drive and cut off adjustments deliver perfect results
Cool 1: 9,518K
Cool 2: 8,620K
Normal: 8,034K
Warm 1: 6,806K
Warm 2: 5,743K



HCC VERDICT

JVC LT-42WX70
£2,000 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Pretty and original design; gorgeous colour reproduction; static HD pictures look seriously sharp

Lows: Obvious motion blur; no external box upgrade options yet

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Universal soldier

Rik Henderson tests a multi-talented Blu-ray player that's taking the fight to the big brand rivals. Should you join its army?

There's nothing wrong with being a fanboy of one of the big brands. Most of us are. Even if your kit rack has a bigger variety of legends than a *Stars in Their Eyes* night at the local pub, you're likely to have a preference of manufacturer – after all, that's why billions of marketing bucks are spent. Matching kit looks good in your room, and if it performs to the standards an HCC reader demands, where's the harm?

However, there are some that slavishly buy into the same brand regardless of efficacy. They're happy to suckle at the teat of their favourite corporation just because of the badge. They're foolhardy, and they're missing out...

The Oppo BDP-831 is the UK version of a Blu-ray player that has had AV-holics in the US frothing

for weeks now. And it's proof positive that you should broaden your horizons when it comes to kit choices. It's the first universal player to hit the HCC Tech Labs, and with a price tag much less than the £5,500 Marantz has slapped onto its SA-7S1 universal machine. Indeed, it's over five grand less.

Multiformat

Now, when I say universal, I'm not talking about DLNA and media-streaming shenanigans. The Oppo BDP-831 is a pure-bred AV player, with barely a nod to home networking save for the fact that it has a LAN port for BD-Live and firmware update purposes.

The universality of this specific deck comes in its ability to play just about any disc you care to feed it,

AV/CV

Product: Affordable universal Blu-ray deck, which features SACD and DVD-Audio playback

Positioning: It's the UK version of internet supplier Oppo's successful BDP-83

Peers: LG BD390; Sony BDP-S560; Samsung BD-P4600

including Super Audio CD and DVD-Audio. Yep, we finally have a Blu-ray player that can spin both of the much-lamented hi-res audio formats, and it only costs £450. Admittedly, this specific function will only be of use to music lovers with legacy collections, but if you're one of those, it's time to get the party poppers out.

And the BDP-831 plays them extremely well indeed. The analogue audio path through the deck is as stable and clean as a sub-grand player could possibly achieve, with the end result being **uncompressed surround sound heaven – resonant and glistening with clarity.**

Naturally, true audiophiles will have already hocked grandma for enough cash to buy a dedicated SACD deck,



→ Specifications

Upscaling: YES 1080p
 Multiregion: NO Region B Blu-ray and R2 DVD
 HDMI: YES 1 x v1.3a
 Component: YES up to 1080i
 Multichannel analogue: YES 7.1
 Digital audio: YES coaxial and optical
 SACD/DVD-A: YES/YES Praise the lord!
 Dolby True HD/DTS HD decoding: YES/YES
 Dolby True HD / DTS HD bitstream: YES/YES
 Profile 2.0: YES, with BD Live
 Dimensions: 430(w) x 77(h) x 336(d)mm
 Weight: 5.1kg
 Also featuring: 2 x USB 2.0 ports; AVCHD, DivX HD, MKV, XviD, MPEG, MP3, JPEG; 24Hz conversion for DVD; Ethernet port; VRS by Anchor Bay processing; Back-lit remote control; HDMI CEC; PAL/NTSC conversion; 1GB internal storage

Tech Labs

but this is certainly good enough for the rest of us.

Some of the muckier formats are also supported, such as the popular high-def video codec MKV. The player is equally *au fait* with DivX HD, WMVHD and a fair few of the standard-def file types, XviD and the like. Any of these can be played via disc or USB storage device (memory stick or external hard drive), although the latter needs to be reformatted to use the FAT32 file system architecture first – a bind as they commonly come with the Windows-friendly NTFS as standard. In addition, the FAT32 system can't handle file sizes of over 4GB (not enough for a 720p movie with full 5.1 audio, for example).

You could, though, always burn oversized files onto a double-sided disc – both DVD-R/DVD+R DL discs are readable.

Exceedingly good Blu-ray

Of course, this is all icing on the cake. The Blu-ray performance is the jam sponge, and, thankfully, it's very tasty indeed. Video playback is excellent but, to be honest, it is on a vast number of similarly-priced decks. What makes the Oppo stand-out is the audio response via HDMI or the 7.1 analogue outputs on the rear. Its proficiency with SACD and DVD-A playback is replicated with DTS-HD MA and Dolby TrueHD. There is a

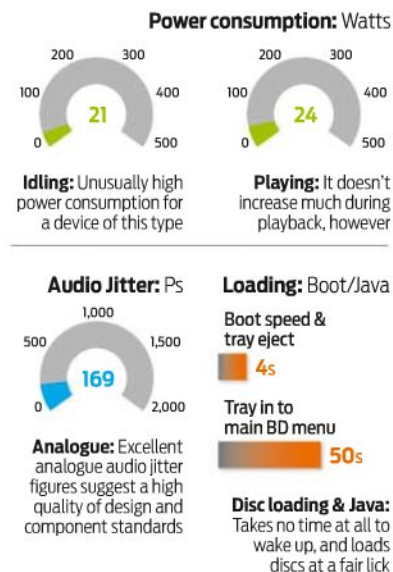
simplicity in its aural spatiality that helps this player rise above the crowd. And I could even be tempted to use the in-built decoders rather than my resident Onkyo receiver's, if I was brave enough. There's no higher praise than that

Of course, not everything is rosy in Oppo's garden. I wasn't blown away by its upscaled SD DVD playback, for instance, regardless of the player adopting VRS by Anchor Bay processing. It's good, but in my mind the LG BD390 offers better for less money (see the review in *HCC* #174). Also, the power consumption is twice what our Tech Labs would expect from a standalone Blu-ray deck. Yet I'm pretty certain those quibbles won't matter to most AV nuts, who'll be far more excited by the top-notch BD playback and SACD/DVD-A support.

Cult hero

While the Oppo BDP-831 is only available to order over the internet (via www.oppo.co.uk), and therefore cannot be auditioned prior to investment, I thoroughly urge all to consider it. There may be nothing fashionable about the brand, and it may not match your super-sexy ultra-thin TV, but it blows many comparable BD decks out of the water. And can thousands of online Oppoholics really be wrong? ●

Solid option:
Build quality on this Blu-ray player is formidable



HCC VERDICT

Oppo BDP-831
£450 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Superb audio performance; SACD & DVD-A playback; sturdy external build quality

Lows: DVD upscaling is only average; DVD tray a bit flimsy

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Raising the game

LG adds AV polish to its usual strong value proposition, says **John Archer**



I'm used to LG TVs being affordable. I'm used to LG TVs being pretty. What I'm not used to, in all honesty, is LG TVs being particularly brilliant. But with the 'Borderless' 42SL8000, the brand can finally pull up a seat at the flat TV top table.

Style-wise, the 42SL8000 immediately makes a positive impression. Despite using a traditional CCFL LCD backlight system, it's less than 50mm deep, and the screen frame is much narrower than usual for LG, too – not actually borderless, but getting there.

The rear panel is stuffed with connections, with four HDMI and a USB port able to play various multimedia formats (including DivX HD). The TV even lets you stream pictures and music wirelessly from Bluetooth phones, or use wireless Bluetooth headsets (fun but not sonically great). The only connection disappointment is the lack of an Ethernet port for online access.

LG has made real efforts recently to get involved with independent organisations like THX and the Imaging Science Foundation, so I'm not surprised to find the high-spec 42SL8000 carrying two ISF options an engineer could use to store optimal picture settings. I don't envisage many people actually calling a calibrator in, but the ISF support is an excellent indicator of how much flexibility LG has built into its first-rate onscreen menu system. Among the options available are contrast and colour boosters, a genuine colour management system, noise reduction routines, and the facility to adjust the power of the screen's 200Hz processing.

If any of this sounds intimidating, fear not. A really nice touch of the 42SL8000 is the Picture Wizard tool

that uses a series of test signals to guide you through calibration.

Black beauty

Picture wise, the 42SL8000 finally convinces me that LG can 'do' really good black levels. In the dark, monochrome opening to *Casino Royale* (still a good test Blu-ray) there's only the faintest trace of grey. The set also renders plenty of subtle detail in dark areas, so that they don't look one-dimensional.

Colour fidelity is superb; almost precociously vibrant, yet also subtle and expressive when needs be. Another emphatically successful facet of the 42SL8000's picture performance is its sharpness. **This screen renders HD images with noiseless precision**, and even standard-definition material appears crisp and detailed.

Arch rival Samsung is keen to point out that LG's 200Hz mode is more accurately described as '100Hz plus a scanning backlight'. That's as may be: what's important is that the 42SL8000 generally delivers clear, fluid motion, although there is a caveat. Even if you sensibly set it to its 'Low' level, the picture processing engine can throw up the occasional glitch – ghostly echoes of small cricket/tennis balls, sporadic stuttering, the occasional flickering edge. If these do crop up regularly on some particular source signal, then you can always turn the engine off completely without an excessive increase in motion blur or judder.

Big bargain

I guess some of you might still be thinking that the 42SL8000's £1,000 price tag looks quite high for an LG 42in TV. But trust me: considering what's on offer, this is arguably LG's biggest bargain yet ●

AV/CV

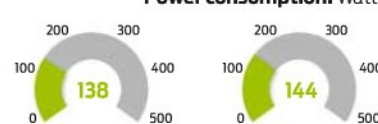
Product: A 42in slim LCD TV with 200Hz, multimedia support, and ISF compatibility

Position: There's a 47in model available. Only the brand's upcoming LED models are higher-end

Peers: JVC LT-42DVI; Samsung UE40B7000; Philips 42PES0001

→ Tech Labs

Power consumption: Watts



White screen: When fed a 100IRE full-white image, power consumption hits 138W. Energy Saving Mode cuts a further 71W

Test footage: Not much increase in power consumption when displaying a movie playing in full volume

Contrast: ratio



Picture: Disappointingly poor contrast ratio of 549:1 in Standard mode, but the shopfloor-friendly Vivid mode outperforms LG's own claims at 375,419:1

Colour temp: Kelvin



Presets: A small selection of CT presets includes an acceptable Warm setting. Luminance is fairly high at 85.78fL.
Cool: 11,362K
Medium: 8,544K
Warm: 6,129K

HCC VERDICT

LG 42SL8000
£1,000 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Great design; features and connections galore; above average picture quality

Lows: Occasional artefact with 200Hz; no Ethernet port

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

HD Ready: YES Full HD, 1080p24

Component video: YES one input

HDMI: YES 4 x v1.3 HDMI's

PC input: YES 1 x D-Sub

Resolution: 1920 x 1080

Brightness (claimed): 500 cd/m²

Contrast ratio (claimed): 150,000:1

Dimensions: 1001.2(w) x 623.2(h) x 49.8(d)mm

Weight: 17.2kg

Features: ISF presets/calibration support; backlight adjustment; dynamic contrast system; eye care mode; gamma adjustment; colour presets and management; Picture Wizard set up tool;

Bluetooth headset/phone MP3/

JPEG compatibility; JPEG, MP3,

DivX 1080p HD, HD .mkv, and

WMV playback from USB



The 42SL8000 breathes fresh air into LG's TV designs

The best DVD recorder available?
Probably



Monument to XS

Weld a 250GB Freesat HD PVR to a DVD recorder, and you have the DMR-XS350. **Martin Pipe** has the lowdown



Freeview PVRs may be thick on the ground, but the same can't be said of Freesat HD recorders. Currently, there's a grand total of four models – of which three are manufactured by Panasonic (the other being Humax's Foxsat-HDR).

However, the Pannys do differ from their only rival in that they each combine some kind of optical disc-recording with their PVR prowess. For example, the DMR-XS350 tested here features a DVD recorder (while its more pricey brethren feature Blu-ray burners). It's a move that keeps the cost down and shouldn't necessarily put you off.

Admittedly, as DVD is very much a

standard-def medium, preserving your favourite hi-def programmes on disc is a no-go. But HD recordings can be downconverted to one of four SD modes (and stereo), and while they lose the pixel count and hi-def sheen, they nevertheless outshine ones made from the equivalent SD source.

Double delight

The XS350 doesn't contain any analogue or Freeview tuners; in the place of the usual UHF input and output terminals are two LNB inputs.

Thanks to the dual tuners they feed, the XS350 is Panasonic's first DVD/HDD recorder with the ability to simultaneously record and view

While u wait:

The Ethernet port on the XS350 should soon be capable of accessing iPlayer.

Panasonic's own VieraCast portal makes do for now

different channels – or record two different channels, one of which can be watched. To make the most of this, your dish needs to be fitted with a dual LNB. If you only have one, you can't record one programme while viewing another – even if both are carried on the same transponder. This is a deliberate ploy, Panasonic told me; some users won't understand why some permutations of channels work while others don't.

When recording, the channel's bitstream is captured to the HDD with no recompression. In this 'DR' HDD mode – the only Freesat recording option – the XS350's 250GB hard drive will accommodate



→ Specifications

DVD Recorder: YES writes to DVD-R/RW, DVD+R/RW and DVD-RAM

Dual-layer recording: YES

HDD: YES 250GB (up to 441 hours SD recording/120 hours HD recording, compressed)

Tuner: YES dual-tuner Freesat HD

Upscaling: YES to 1080p

Recording modes: Four – plus FR and four HD modes (internal conversion)

HDMI: YES with CEC Viera Link

Component output: YES

Stereo phono output: YES

Digital audio output: YES coaxial

Dimensions: 430(w) x 59(h) x 330(d)mm

Weight: 4.3kg

Features: Ethernet port for VieraCast/Freesat online features; RGB Scart input/output; FireWire input; CD jukebox with Gracenote database; USB port; SD card slot; copying of MP3/JPEG/AVCHD to HDD; high-speed dubbing from HDD-DVD; Flexible-Rate 'make-it-fit' option; automatic recording of series; PCM audio recording option (for XP mode); 32-event/1-month timer; view DVD while HDD records

around 38 hours of HD or 105 hours of SD recording. For recordings from external AV sources, you can use the four modes of previous Panasonic DVD recorders – XP, SP, LP and EP.

Setting up and driving the XS350 is a paragon of simplicity; Panasonic was one of the first companies to produce DVD recorders, and it's had plenty of time to fine-tune its act. Tuning is automated; a wizard checks for signals on the LNB inputs, asks you where you live (so regional variations are applied) and speedily finds the channels. **The menu system is well-organised, but becomes noticeably less responsive when the unit is recording.** I sometimes had to wait over a minute when checking future EPG schedules.

Timed recordings can be scheduled directly from a one-week EPG. For relevant BBC and ITV programmes, you're offered the choice between SD and HD. Automatic series recording and pausing of live TV is possible, too.

Performance

With BBC HD and ITV HD, visuals are distinguished by razor-sharp clarity, freedom from artefacting, impressive depth and a wide colour range. Playback of PVR recordings shows

AV/CV

Product: 250GB HDD/DVD recorder with twin Freesat HD tuner

Position: Below Panasonic's BD recorders in the DIGA stable

Peers: Panasonic DMR-BS850; Sony RDR-HXD1095; Pioneer DVR-LX70DD

no deterioration. Compare this to other DVD recorders – including Panasonic's lower-rung models – which recompress the video and introduce artefacts in the process. As a DVD archiver the XS350 offers the best-quality potential available, because the initial HDD recording has been lifted 'off the air' with no recompression. I recommend sticking to the XP and SP modes, though.

I was also surprised how well the Panasonic can compress HD DR recordings to make extra space on the HDD. 38 hours of HD can be compressed to allow 120 hours to fit on the HDD. Conversion can be carried out overnight when the unit is in standby. Even the lowest-quality mode (HL) is acceptable, considering how much info is effectively being thrown away. There's little visible detail missing (a 1920 x 1080 resolution is retained), although video artefacts are more obvious. Higher-bitrate HD modes yield fewer problems, but occupy more space.

SD broadcasting is Freesat's Achilles' heel. Even the Beeb's SD output suffers from feathering and blockiness, especially if it's upscaled to fit a large hi-def screen. And with commercial broadcasters, you can combine these problems with a picture that's softer than the Freeview

'simulcast'. Why? Because broadcasters like ITV and Channel 4 have specified a lower resolution for Freesat (544 x 576i), than they do on Freeview (704 x 576i). Bizarre.

I should also note that, due to some kind of incompatibility issue, no resolution higher than 576p was possible with my 720p projector (Hitachi's PJ-TX100).

Conclusion

As far as DVD/HDD recorders are concerned, the XS350 is easily the cream of the crop. It can make fine recordings, and is a superb player, too. Hopefully Panasonic will introduce a similar twin-tuner Freeview model with DR-mode recording and, ideally, a larger HDD ●

HCC VERDICT

Panasonic DMR-XS350
£650 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Well-featured; oodles of recording flexibility

Lows: No way of getting HD recordings out of the machine; no 5.1 audio on DVDs made from HD sources

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

TV with a tech twist

Mark Craven meets a PVR-cum-DVD-player-cum-HDTV

This 32in TV from upstart British brand Cello is a unique product, combining an in-built multiregion DVD player, HD Ready screen and direct Freeview recording to SD card. In that respect it's highly innovative, and the appetising price tag doesn't do it any harm either.

Highs

- Cello's SD card recording system is a hoot. Simply slot in a card and away you go. Bear in mind that a 1GB card will only fit 40mins of Freeview material, though, so you'll need to invest in ones of a bigger capacity. These currently go up to 32GB, but those cost around £70.
- The twin tuners allow recording of one channel while watching another. Other trickplay functions like pausing live TV and rewinding are also possible. There's even a split-screen option allowing budding Bond villains to watch two channels

at the same time – but only with one audio stream, obviously.

- The multiregion deck will also spin JPEGs and MP3/WMA music files.

Lows

- The screen's unusual 1,440 x 900 resolution forms a PC-style 16:10 shape, meaning standard 16:9 sources undergo scanning.
- While Freeview pictures are adequate, both DVD and Blu-ray playback suffer from various problems, including noise and motion judder. Our Tech Labs measured the contrast ratio at a lowly 505:1. Not a good choice for your primary screen, then, but okay for a second room.
- While the styling is fine, it's a bit chubby compared to the competition.



Innovative:
Cello is the first TV brand to enable direct-to-SD card recording

HCC VERDICT

Cello C3298FR
£450 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Overall: **1 2 3 4 5**

BENQ JOYBEE GPI → £500 Approx → www.benq.co.uk

Mini-me projection

A pretty portable projector, says **Chris Jenkins**

BenQ's Joybee GPI is meant for those who wants to project still and video images from a digital camera, personal multimedia player, iPod or USB device. Home cinema it certainly ain't, but it does what it does well, and is small, light and well-specced enough to be

an intriguing introduction to projection technology.

Highs

- The GPI can project an image of 15-80in diagonal at a resolution of 858 x 600 (it can accept an input up to 1280 x 1024, but downscales it).

Image size is determined by the distance from the screen – throw ratio is 1.92. There's a neat automatic keystone correction function.

- BenQ's claimed contrast ratio of 2,000:1 is in the right ball-park; there's a decent selection of colour temperature and wall colour preset adjustments, too.

Lows

- Brightness is low at around 100 Lumens. It fares okay in a semi-darkened room, but the lack of fine detail in dark areas is obvious.
- The tiny internal 2W speaker is in danger of being drowned by the relatively high 28dB system noise.

HCC VERDICT

BenQ Joybee GPI
£500 Approx

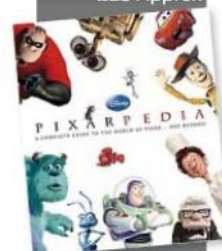
Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Overall: **1 2 3 4 5**



In Brief

Pixarpedia
Dorling
Kindersley
£25 Approx



Dorling Kindersley books are generally feasts for the eyes, but few could look quite so visually stunning as *Pixarpedia*. Its 300+ pages are bursting at the seams with thousands of crisp and colourful Pixar movie stills, and though it's primarily aimed at sprogs, adults will love it too.

1 2 3 4 5

A collection of five black, spherical Eclipse TD speakers. Two are positioned at the top, and three are in the center. Each speaker has a silver-colored grille and is mounted on a silver-colored stand. The background is dark, and the speakers are reflected on a glossy surface below them.

However good it looks,
it can sound a whole lot better.

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78 DEFINITIVE TECHNOLOGY MYTHOS SSA-42 COLLECTION → £1,600 Approx
→ www.deftechmythos.com



Myth of surround

Jim Hill auditions a US-made soundbar that promises to 'bend' sound



AV/CV

Product:
High-end
soundbar
solution

Positioning:
DefTech also
has a slightly
larger bar, the
SSA-50, to suit
a 50in TV

Peers:
Bowers &
Wilkins
Panorama;
Yamaha
YSP 40D

For anyone who doesn't have the space for five speakers in the front room, a single wall-mountable soundbar seems like the ideal solution. But can one narrow box full of drive units really replace a proper surround setup? The answer all too often is 'no', but Definitive Technology (DefTech to its fans) reckons its Mythos speaker goes further than any other by 'bending' sound waves around the audience to create the illusion of cinema sound from a single source.

The Mythos provides all five channels as individual drive units, with specially-shaped surround drivers to guide the rear effects to the back of the room, and a high-performance subwoofer providing the LFE signal. Sling it under your TV – it comes with a bracket and installation instructions – and connect it to your amp with five runs of speaker cable and you're almost there. Adjusting the subwoofer to match the speaker levels is a matter of taste, but it's still relatively easy to get a well-balanced sound flooding your room.

For such a thin cabinet, the small drive units do a distinguished job of projecting into the room and providing a bouncy, full-bodied bass. I suspect that's partly due to the unusual concentric tweeter design that seems to stick out in front of the mid bass drivers, and partly because of the superb SuperCube III woofer.

The mid-bass drivers and their supported tweeters deliver the front left and right and centre channels. They do this with a close attention to detail that gives the Mythos set a delicate sound, well-suited to music and subtle soundtracks.

This integrates well with the compact sub. Despite its comically small dimensions, it packs a potent 650W Class D amp that can kick

out an alarming amount of grunt. Unsurprisingly, the modest 7.5in driver can't reach the lowest frequencies, and it works best with the crossover set no lower than 80Hz, but at this level, you have **all the punchy bass you might reasonably expect.** Two side-facing passive radiators, the same size as the main woofer, help shift some air.

The Mythos system can't actually fill a huge room with sound. I heard distortion in the treble before reaching really high volume levels, but at the same time, it doesn't rely on side walls for reflection, so it's much more flexible about the space that it'll work in, and its output level is a massive step up from any TV.

The tricky bit with forward-facing soundbars is, of course, making it sound as if the rear FX are coming from behind you. Definitive Technology attempts to achieve this by using a central plastic waveguide that directs the sound waves to the sides and with a slight delay. It's not wholly convincing; this arrangement can't direct sounds with pinpoint accuracy, like the bullets in *Blood Diamond* that zip from the front to the back of the room. However, it does give a pleasing three-dimensional feel and, at times, the illusion of wrap-around sound.

Product of convenience

The SSA-42 will fit flush with a 42in TV, while its larger brother, the SSA-50, is designed to compliment a 50in set. Being a sealed enclosure, with no front or rear ports, it's unfussy about placement. Hiding the bundle of five speaker cables might still be a challenge for any installer, but this is indeed a product of convenience that'll bring surround sound thrills to rooms where there's simply no space for speakers.

→ Specifications

Mythos SSA-42

Drive Units: 3 x 3.25in BDSS drivers with axially-aligned .75in pure aluminium dome tweeters; 2 x 3.25in high-output full-range drivers; 4 x 3in full-range high-output surround drivers
Frequency Response: 60 Hz–30 kHz
Sensitivity: 89dB
Power Handling: 175W
Dimensions: 1016(w) x 105(h) x 105(d)mm
Weight: 9.1kg
Connections: 5 x pairs of five-way binding posts

SuperCube III

Drive Units: 1 x 7.5in woofer coupled to 2 x 7.5in bass radiators
Frequency Response: 16Hz–200Hz
Onboard power: 650W
Dimensions: 260(w) x 260(d) x 260(h) mm
Weight: 11.3kg
Connections: LFE input; 2 x pairs of high-level five-way binding posts; 2 x low-level inputs

HCC VERDICT

Definitive Technology Mythos
SSA-42 Collection
£1,600 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Compact and convenient design; potent subwoofer; deep and well-projected soundfield
Lows: LF isn't super-low; doesn't quite reach behind convincingly

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Market forces:
The SSA-42 provides competition to the likes of Bowers & Wilkins and Yamaha

Designer streamer

Chris Jenkins has a killer media streamer in his sights

Compro's VideoMate Network Media Center T1000W, to give it its full Terminator-style title, is cooler than it sounds. Take something like the Popcorn Hour A110 – an all-singing, all-dancing, web-surfing, bit-torrenting media server that looks like it was cobbled together on someone's kitchen table – then imagine it dressed up as a super-stylish desktop unit with snazzy blue lights and an added digital TV tuner. That's the Compro.

The design is immediately eye-catching, but there's a feeling of disappointment when you realise that its vertical element does not include a video screen, merely a status display. The base contains a bay into which you can insert your choice of SATA 3.5in hard drive. After fitting and formatting my HDD it was time to play...

Five star

The nifty, appealing GUI has five main

sections; Setup, TV, BT, HD and Web. The TV section features full auto scanning of channels and delivers a solid Freeview picture. There's an EPG with manual and programmed recording modes, though it lacks a series link option.

From the HD menu, you can play back video, audio and image files from the hard drive, attached USB device or another networked device. Formats supported include hi-res MKV and AVCHD. There are functions to copy files from one device to another; network options include setup for Samba/NFS device sharing.

Web functions on the T1000W are limited to YouTube access (Compro says it plans to add more in future). This means that to use BitTorrent functions you have to find the torrent files you need on a PC, transfer them to the Compro and activate them using the BT menu. Up to three torrents can be handled at a time, including when the machine is

AV/CV

Product: Network media centre with digital TV tuner, web access and BitTorrent client

Position: PC accessory specialist's first standalone media centre

Peers: Popcorn Hour A110; Wyplay Wyplayer

on standby; but torrenting is suspended while you carry out any other video tasks.

A small telescopic aerial is supplied, which you'll probably find pretty useless for Freeview reception. Likewise, the 802.11g wireless network functions are suitable for 'net purposes only; for movie playback a physical 10/100 LAN is recommended, as I experienced stutter and stoppage when trying to stream video wirelessly.

Solid start

The T1000W is beautifully-designed and full of potential. If it's a let-down in any area, it's in the lack of Freeview series recording and the limited web access, but as with many of 21st-century bits of kit, these may be improved via updates.

→ Specifications

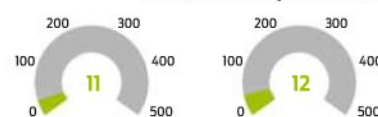
HDMI output: YES plus component, composite, and S-video
Digital audio output: YES via HDMI, optical or coaxial
HDD: 3.5in SATA, up to 1TB
Video formats: AVI, MPEG-1/2/4, MOV(H.264), TS, ASF, MKV, WMV9, AVCHD, VC-1, ISO, VOB
Audio formats: MP3, WMA, WAV, PCM
Image Formats: JPG
Dimensions: 180(w) x 270(H) x 180(d)mm
Weight: 3kg
Features: BitTorrent client; file copy function; NFS/SMB network sharing; firmware upgradeable; 3 x USB 2.0 inputs; Ethernet and wireless LAN connectors



The Compro certainly looks the part

→ Tech Labs

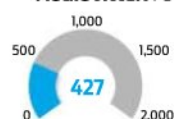
Power consumption: Watts



Idling: Using only 11W when idling, the T1000W won't be the worst culprit in your setup

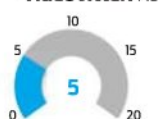
Playing: ...and it doesn't make much difference to the Compro's power consumption when it's playing

Audio Jitter: Ps



Analogue: Jitter is relatively low – as you might expect from a solid state streamer

Video Jitter: Ns



Vision: This is a good result, suggesting a stable video output signal

HCC VERDICT

Compro VideoMate T1000W
£190 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Living room-friendly looks; extensive functionality; quality performance

Lows: No series recording; limited web access

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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www.freedom.net & www.journal-plaza.net

A new age of Blu

With the price of Blu-ray decks dropping, **Chris Jenkins** auditions four affordable new models that represent the best in class





THE CONTENDERS

NEW JVC XV-BP1

£310 Approx

JVC's first standalone BD player is aimed at the content addict. As well as Blu-ray, DVD and CD playback, it also offers extensive file support

NEW PHILIPS BDP7300

£230 Approx

Philips has come late to the Blu-ray party, but it intends to catch up fast with superior AV performance and an eye-catching design

NEW SHARP BD-HP22

£190 Approx

Improved audio decoding and 'eco' credentials are major selling points of this deck. It's also the one likely to be bundled with Sharp's Aquos TVs

NEW SONY BDP-S360

£190 Approx

Sony's entry-level BDP-S350 player was a best-seller for the brand, but this replacement is no mere cosmetic update

THE TEST

As well as viewing a standard selection of Blu-ray and DVD movies and demo discs on each player, we switched from one deck to another for A/B comparisons, using a Gefen HDMI switcher connected to an LG 42in LCD TV in our Tech Labs. For audio testing, we used a selection of audiophile CDs and audio-only Blu-ray discs, including 2L's *Divertimenti* by the Trondheim Solistene.

Considering that these are similarly-priced models you might be forgiven for expecting no great variation in Blu-ray playback performance. But it transpires that there's more to separate these players than loading speeds, styling and interfaces. Read on for the full skinny...

Blu-ray had a troubled gestation, with the format war against HD DVD slowing its development, PC-like problems with partially-finished profiles on early models, and buyers understandably reluctant to fork out on a player while the format's interactive standards were still evolving. Those days should now be past, with HD DVD consigned to history, BD Profile 1 and Profile 1.1 receding memories, and the bliss of Profile 2.0 users disturbed only by the gnashing of teeth and regretful wailing of early adopters.

Yet while it's now very difficult to find a Blu-ray player which is actively 'bad' – the requirements of BD and HD are such that anything that meets spec is pretty much guaranteed to give you acceptable picture and sound performance – there are still plenty of areas where players can differ, including file format support, disc loading times, styling and build, general usability and AVR compatibility. Let's see how they compare...

Features

Clearly based on LG's BD370 model right down to its menus, the JVC XV-BP1 is a Profile 2.0 player, but lacks internal storage, so you have to connect a 1GB+ USB stick to the front port for storage of downloaded BD-Live material. The USB port also supports playback of MPEG-4, MP3, WMA, JPEG, PNG, GIF and AVCHD, the high-definition file format commonly used by camcorders, including JVC's own HD Everio line. It also supports HD files with an MKV designation. The player lacks the YouTube functionality featured on the LG BD370, though.

The JVC features bitstream output and onboard decoding of Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio soundtracks (but not multichannel analogue audio outputs), and has HDMI v1.3 with Deep Colour and x.v.Colour, a standard Ethernet LAN port, component and composite video outputs, and analogue, optical and coaxial audio outputs.

It can play 1080p/60/50 and 1080p/24 output resolutions via HDMI, but doesn't offer any advanced picture adjustments, such as preset picture modes or noise reduction.

In the audio setup menu, you have the option to select stereo or multichannel PCM for HDMI or Primary Pass-Thru (which means bitstream output). There's also a DTS Re-encode function which converts standard DTS to AC3 if your amp isn't compatible.

Philips' BDP7300 is most notable for its inclusion of 5.1-channel analogue audio outputs. Use these to send decoded TrueHD and DTS-HD MA soundtracks to AV receivers with multichannel analogue inputs. Though this doesn't give you the option of surround back channels with 7.1 soundtracks, it's a boon for those who have older amplifiers.

Another advantage of the Philips over other players in this grouptest is that it has 1GB of memory built-in, so you don't need to attach a USB device to enjoy BD-Live. It also

JVC XV-BP1 → £310 Approx → www.jvc.co.uk



Overview

JVC's decision to make its first release of a standalone BD player a badged version of an LG model might not fill potential buyers with confidence. Nevertheless, the XV-BP1 (like its BD370 inspiration) is a highly credible product, even though it loses the

YouTube support along the way. Its support of MKV and other HD media files might appeal to those who want to supplement their supply of high-definition material by downloading from the 'net, but this may not be a major factor in a lot of people's buying decisions.

Copy cat:
Interesting fact: under the JVC hood lurks the guts of an LG player

Connections

A Fashion victim

While the illuminated blue buttons have a certain design charm, they might irritate you after a while – and they can't be dimmed

B Front-loader

The JVC can play all manner of file formats loaded from a USB device, including AVCHD and MKV

C Your choice

Both optical and coaxial digital audio outputs are provided



means that the front USB socket can be used for other media.

The Sharp BD-HP22 is a little feature-lite. The HDMI output is the only way to get 7.1 sound as it has no multichannel analogue outputs, and BD-Live functions require a 2GB+ USB 2.0 device to be connected to the socket – which, irritatingly, is on the rear. Nor does the Sharp support media playback via the USB port, or MP3 or WMA files at all.

Unlike its S350 predecessor, which required a firmware update, the Sony BDP-S360 supports

FEATURES

Round-up: These Profile 2.0 machines are very comparable in terms of connectivity and AV functions. The obvious exception is the Philips, which, in offering 5.1-channel analogue audio outputs, built-in storage for BD-Live data and media access via the USB port, pushes itself ahead of the pack

JVC XV-BP1: 1 2 3 4 5

Philips BDP7300: 1 2 3 4 5

Sharp BD-HP22: 1 2 3 4 5

Sony BDP-S360: 1 2 3 4 5

BD-Live from the box. Socketry is fine for such an affordable player; video-wise there's an HDMI output, which, of course, supports HD audio, Deep Colour and x.v.Colour, and component and composite video outputs. Dedicated audio output options are both optical and coaxial digital, and a stereo analogue pair. Obviously if you want to get hi-res 5.1 or 7.1 channel, HDMI is your choice. With this, you can use the Direct mode to output Dolby True HD and DTS HD MA bitstreams for your amplifier to decode. If it can't handle HD audio, your best bet is to select the Sony's LPCM output option.

The Sony has a standard Ethernet connection to networks for BD-Live functionality, but you will still need to connect a 1GB+ USB flash drive to the socket (again at the back) to store downloaded video files.

Design

Apart from Samsung's range of table-top and wall-mount models, there doesn't tend to be much

variation in the design of BD players; generally they're the same standard width as most DVD players, designed to sit under a TV, and have minimal front-panel controls. Height and depth can vary, as can the positioning of additional controls and sockets, which are sometimes under a flap. But it's pretty hard to innovate without risking putting off some potential buyers.

The JVC's main design feature is its illuminated blue buttons. They give an immediate impression of style and modernity, but you might soon get fed up of them, and they can't be switched off or dimmed. The disc tray is next to the Power button, which can be annoying if you confuse it with the Eject button. The onscreen menus are bold and clear, and there's a choice of background 'skins'. The remote control is simply designed and easy to use.

Philips always scores well on design, so it's no surprise that the BDP7300 is slim, curvaceous and sleek. Its gloss-black fascia has just >

PHILIPS BDP7300 → £230 Approx → www.philips.co.uk



Overview

Philips' philosophy for Blu-ray player design encompasses simplicity, ease of use and flexibility. The company makes a virtue of the fact that its players support a wide range of formats, and the USB 2.0 port enables connection to other devices. Its decks are also designed to handle

problem discs, recognising causes of errors such as fingerprints, scratches, and warping. Philips also claims its BD lineup is designed to look less technical and blend better with the interior you choose. The rounded lines of the current range certainly matches TVs such as the 7000 and 8000 models.

Heavy metal:

The Philips deck has a reassuringly weighty build

Connections

A Watch your step

With the power button situated here, you may end up pressing it when you mean to eject a disc...

B Media spinner

With its internal memory of 1GB, this USB port is free to use for playback of imported files

C Welcome addition

Unique in this group, the Philips' multichannel audio outs carry decoded 5.1 audio



four front-panel buttons, plus the disc tray, USB port and display. Bodywork is satisfyingly robust, suggesting that this might be a long-lasting design. Again, it's a minor annoyance that the disc tray is next to the Power button.

The menu system also has a simplistic approach, with three main options, Play Disc, USB and Settings, each illustrated with a large icon. The remote control is symmetrical and uncluttered, and has a large Home key and dedicated controls for BD-Live functions and HDMI output resolution.

The Sharp has a smart frontpanel with a central logo, but a rather primitive-looking LCD display, and the control buttons on the left are a little fiddly. There's also no good reason why the disc tray should be concealed under a small flap. The onscreen menus are crudely designed, but the remote control is an exercise in simplicity.

The Sony is the most 'designer' of our reviewed models, with its slim,

shallow dimensions, all-black finish, subtle blue fascia lighting and transparent fascia flap. The flap drops when the tray opens to reveal a display panel and a minimal selection of controls. There isn't a great deal of point to the flap, but it does make the player look snazzy when it's not in use.

The onscreen menus use a version of the PlayStation 3's Xross media bar, which is a matter of taste – personally I find it too fussy. The remote control, though, is basic, to the point of lacking a disc eject button.

DESIGN

Round-up: Certainly in terms of design the Philips and Sony stand out from the pack, the Philips for its hardware design, the Sony for its operating system. We still quite like the look of the Sharp though, but if you prefer simplicity, the JVC won't offend

JVC XV-BP1: 1 2 3 4 5

Philips BDP7300: 1 2 3 4 5

Sharp BD-HP22: 1 2 3 4 5

Sony BDP-S360: 1 2 3 4 5

Performance

It goes without saying that excellent HD pictures and multichannel sound are requirements of any Blu-ray player – they are the features the whole format is sold on. While I'm yet to see a BD deck that really disappoints in these areas, there can be variations in picture and sound performance, largely to do with the processing of different image sources such as upscaled DVD and 24p movie material.

I tried each player with a range of familiar Blu-ray and DVD material, looking for differences in picture tone, motion handling, and audio skills.

As the JVC is, in essence, a re-badged LG BD370 (which we reviewed back in *HCC* #170), it stands to reason that its video performance should be comparable, and the similarity of the Tech Labs results reinforce that claim. This means that the JVC is a great video performer for its price point (with a good video jitter rating and accurate control of jaggies and noise >

SHARP BD-HP22 → £190 Approx → www.sharp.co.uk



Overview

One of Sharp's major selling points for its latest BD players is 'eco-friendliness'. However, the BD-HP22 uses 16W when spinning our test disc, which isn't an unusually low figure; this drops to 13W when left in idle mode, but real eco-warriors

should power it down fully when it's not in use.

Sharp's company philosophy is one of 'Sincerity, Harmony, Politeness, Creativity and Courage.' We're not sure how that relates to the BD-HP22, but it gives us a warm feeling inside.

Sharp: Sincere, polite, harmonious, creative and courageous, apparently

Connections

A No truck with MP3

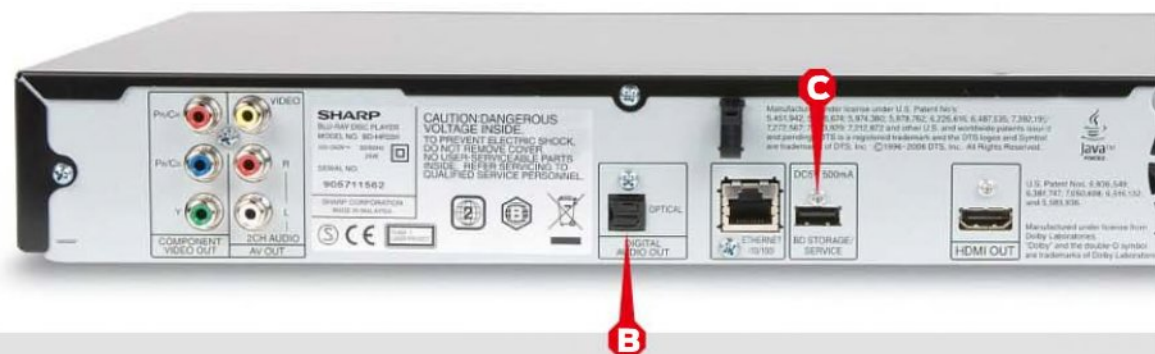
Curiously, the Sharp Blu-ray deck won't play MP3 files, even ones burned to disc

B Simple audio

If you have a standard all-in-one home cinema system, this optical output will most likely be your port of call for (lossy) surround sound from Blu-rays

C Give me more space!

Sharp specifies a 2GB+ USB stick be connected before BD-Live will work



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reduction). Perhaps, though, the audio has been refined – as jitter figures here are better than the LG BD370 – resulting in a clean and dynamic soundscape. Startup and disc loading speeds were pretty average, but fast enough for most.

The Philips immediately stood out as a top picture performer, with steady, clean images full of detail and colour. It didn't have any trouble with the HQV resolution and jaggies tests, with detail and resolution holding up even with the most exacting panning sequences, and no sign of image noise or moiré patterning. Movie material displays a rich, satisfying realistic colour palette, with lots of contrast and deep blacks and an almost three-dimensional depth. DVD upscaling is impressive too, perhaps not matching the solidity of some more expensive upscalers, but acquitting itself well for the price.

Sound performance is solid and powerful. Both audio jitter and video jitter tested pleasingly low,

suggesting high-quality componentry and circuit design.

Disc loading speed was average, taking 45 seconds to reach the menu on our standard test disc. However, when fed the 3D release of *My Bloody Valentine*, it took an astonishing 16 minutes to load – the longest time we've ever encountered on a BD player.

The Sharp delivered good audio jitter results but a rather poor analogue video jitter figure. I thought the picture sometimes a tad soft, and there was some juddering on panned images. I also got a lot of interference between menus over the HDMI connection to my test TV. Sound was bright and punchy, so no problems there, but the greatest performance problem I encountered was the disc loading time, an agonising 115 seconds for our standard test disc.

The Sony is another slow loader, taking 70 seconds to get to the movie's menus, but once it's there, you tend to be forgiving.

Performance is top-notch, with measurably outstanding video jitter figures (and perfectly acceptable audio jitter) attesting to the quality of design. The picture has the same sort of depth, clarity and 3D effect as the Philips, but if anything deals even better with grain and artefacts, presenting a smooth and pleasing experience with deep contrasts and realistic colours. It's hard to find fault with its sound delivery either. ➤

PERFORMANCE

Round-up: On video performance, the other three decks overshadow the Sharp player. Being a close sibling of the excellent LG BD370 stands the JVC in good stead, while the Sony and Philips players provide crisp, detail-packed images with HD and SD content. Sadly, the Sharp just can't compete

JVC XV-BP1: 1 2 3 4 5

Philips BDP7300: 1 2 3 4 5

Sharp BD-HP22: 1 2 3 4 5

Sony BDP-S360: 1 2 3 4 5

SONY BDP-S360 → £190 Approx → www.sony.co.uk



Overview

While Blu-ray was developed by a wide alliance of electronics and PC manufacturers, it's often thought of as Sony's format, because its BD-based PlayStation 3 console was arguably the main reason rival HD DVD died a death. In fact, there was some question over Sony's

commitment to Blu-ray after its flagship BD-PS550 was made available in very limited quantities – some people even suggesting that Sony was reluctant to challenge sales of its PS3. In my view, the BDP-S360 puts the last nail in the coffin of that particularly daft conspiracy theory.

Old faithful: Sony's S360 sports a stylish transparent front flap

Essentials

A Ready to go

This deck's S350 predecessor was 'BD-Live ready', meaning it required a firmware update before being able to go online. No such worries here

B Two's plenty

No 5.1 or 7.1 analogue outputs here, meaning the only way to get lossless HD audio is via HDMI

C Backside USB

If you want to use BD-Live features, you'll need to plug a USB stick into this rear socket



Final standings

Of the four models auditioned here, the Sharp BD-HP22 is the straggler, partly because of its slightly clunky design, partly for turning its nose up at USB media playback, MP3 and WMA files – but mainly because it has some issues with performance and takes an absolute age to load discs.

JVC's XV-BP1 is a better proposition, thanks to its wide file compatibility, and generally good all-round performance.

However, Sony's BDP-S360 and Philips BDP7300 fight for the top spot, and it's the Sony that ultimately takes it, both through its video performance and undeniable value for money. Personally, I'm not convinced that the full-length front flap or the Xross GUI add anything to its charms, and the feature count is minimal,



but it's still a solid buy from a brand that knows its Blu onions.

Its Philips rival puts up a good show though, and offers several advantages that may sway discerning buyers; those multichannel audio outputs, internal

storage for BD-Live material, and media playback from USB. On the other hand, these may not be of any use to you – and it loses ground through its astonishingly tardy performance on the *My Bloody Valentine* Blu-ray ●

1ST



HCC VERDICT

Sony BDP-S360
£190 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Good design and AV performance

Lows: Turns its nose up at multimedia playback

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

BD Profile: 2.0

HDMI output: yes 1 x v1.3

Phono audio output: yes stereo

Digital audio output: yes 1 x optical and coaxial

Other connections: Component video output; composite video output; USB 2.0 (for BD-Live only); Ethernet

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: YES/YES

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream: YES/YES

Storage: External

Dimensions: 430(w) x 56(h) x 216(d)mm

Weight: 2.1kg

Also features: Bravia Sync; Deep Colour; x.v.Colour; MP3, JPG and AVCHD compatibility; panel dimming

2ND



HCC VERDICT

Philips BDP7300
£230 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Multichannel audio outputs; internal storage; excellent performance

Lows: Some playback issues

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

BD Profile: 2.0

HDMI output: yes 1 x v1.3

Phono audio output: yes 5.1

Digital audio output: yes 1 x optical and coaxial

Other connections: Component video output; composite video output; USB 2.0

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: YES/YES

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream: YES/YES

Storage: Internal (1GB)

Dimensions: 435(w) x 58(h) x 308(d)mm

Weight: 4.1kg

Also features: DivX Ultra certification; x.v.Colour; EasyLink; MP3, WMA, WMV, JPEG and AVCHD compatibility; Night mode

3RD



HCC VERDICT

JVC XV-BP1
£310 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Clear menus; quality AV performance; MP3 and DivX support

Lows: Irritating design flaws

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

BD Profile: 2.0

HDMI output: yes 1 x v1.3

Phono audio output: yes stereo

Digital audio output: yes 1 x optical and coaxial

Other connections: Component video output; composite video output; USB 2.0; Ethernet

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: YES/YES

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream: YES/YES

Storage: External

Dimensions: 430(w) x 54(h) x 245(d)mm

Weight: 2.8kg

Also features: DivX certification; Deep Colour; x.v.Colour; MP3, JPG, PNG, GIF, WMA and AVCHD compatibility; Last Scene Memory; screen saver

4TH



HCC VERDICT

Sharp BD-HP22
£190 Approx

Price check: www.techradar.com/reviews

Highs: Good audio performance; simple-to-use remote control

Lows: Design flaws; very slow loading times

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

BD Profile: 2.0

HDMI output: yes 1 x v1.3

Phono audio output: yes stereo

Digital audio output: yes 1 x optical

Other connections: Component video output; composite video output; USB 2.0 (for BD-Live only); Ethernet

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: YES/YES

Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream: YES/YES

Storage: External

Dimensions: 432(w) x 58(h) x 260(d)mm

Weight: 3kg

Also features: x.v.Colour; Aquos Link; Keylock; JPG playback

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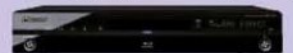
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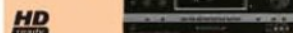
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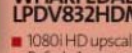
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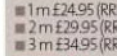
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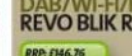
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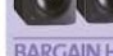
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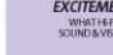
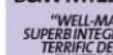
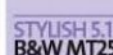
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PLAYBACK

→ **Software highlights** **DRAG ME TO HELL** Slapstick horror makes a spectacular comeback! **NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM 2** Ben Stiller returns, but is he still funny? **BRAVEHEART** Och aye, the Blu **ROME** The historical serial gets the hi-def treatment **LUC BESSON** Five flicks from the French master **SHAUN OF THE DEAD** Zom-com reissue **AND MUCH MORE!**

Day tripper

24: Season Seven → All-region BD → 20th Century Fox

The scourge of terrorists everywhere, Jack Bauer, races through another 24 hours of breakneck action and adventure. Turn to p105 to see what our experts make of his Blu-ray outing

HCC Ratings key

| | |
|---------------|-----------|
| CIA | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| CTU | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| C3PO | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| CI5 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| CeCe Peniston | 1 2 3 4 5 |



'This is the last time I trust the weather forecast!'

Highway to hell

Sam Raimi takes a break from Spider-Man and returns to his horror roots



HCC VERDICT

Drag Me to Hell
Lionsgate → Region B Blu-ray
£25 Approx

We say: Light on extras, but Raimi's return to horror makes for a delightful hi-def platter

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Drag Me to Hell is a much needed breath-of-fresh-air for the increasingly self-referential, po-faced and torture-obsessed American horror genre. It's not the most original film – the story about a young woman with only days to live after being cursed treads much of the same ground as MR James' *Casting the Runes* (and the excellent 1957 adaptation *Night of the Demon*) – but that really doesn't matter a jot, as writer-director Sam Raimi delivers a fast-paced and playful chiller that's entirely focused on making its audience jump. In other words; exactly the kind of silly ghoulish treat Hollywood seemed to have given up on.

Mark Craven on picture: Presented in its original AVC-encoded 2.35:1 aspect ratio, Lionsgate's Blu-ray release of Raimi's latest spooktacular does an excellent job of accurately replicating the film's rather muted and dull visual style. The downside to this is that the resulting hi-def imagery can seem 'flat' in comparison to other BD encodes. This, however, is counter-balanced by excellent colour reproduction and a fine layer of grain that ensures the imagery retains a natural filmic feel. Technically faultless, but not exactly reference level.

Steve May on audio: Raimi's slapstick horror has a soundtrack as frolicsome as its story. No opportunity is missed to place creaks and freakish sound effects in the darkest corners of the DTS HD-MA 5.1 mix, and the LFE grumbles like Old Nick when required. The score by horror veteran Christopher Young, with its plaintive gypsy violin refrain and soaring choral work, is suitably atmospheric, and great demo sequences abound: the goat-baiting séance to call forth the demonic Lamia is a particular hoot, while the car park attack sequence is ripe with ribald staple-punching sonic design. Like a fairground thrill ride, the soundtrack to *DMTH* is eerie, economic and devilishly effective.

Anton van Beek on extras: Other than the two different cuts of the movie – with a whopping seven-seconds of difference between them – the only other extras are *Production Diaries* and some interviews with Sam Raimi and stars Alison Lohman and Justin Long. The behind-the-scenes footage in the former is interesting, if lacking a little depth, while the interviews are typical EPK fare. It's such a shame that there's no Raimi commentary, as those he's recorded for the *Evil Dead* films have been real fan-pleasers.

I Sell the Dead

Anchor Bay → All-Region BD
£25 Approx



Genre legend Ron Perlman is among the cast of this tribute to the horror anthologies

of yesteryear. Presented as the confessions of a grave robber on the eve of his execution, *I Sell the Dead* has its heart in the right place, but fails to entertain or scare in sufficient measure. The AVC 2.35:1 encode isn't great either – the heaps of grain and lack of fine detail is reminiscent of good upscaled SD content. A front-heavy DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix offers little over the LPCM stereo track. A fair collection of extras includes a 65-min *Making of...*, commentaries and a visual effects featurette. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Rogue

Icon → Region B BD
£20 Approx



Wolf Creek director Greg McLean returns to the Australian bush, only this time it's not a deranged

loon but a killer croc picking off the unlucky tourists. *Rogue* aims squarely for the B-movie monster flick and – thanks to excellent direction and a good cast including Radha Mitchell and Sam Worthington – delivers in style. It's helped by an exceptional AVC 1.85:1 encode, and DTS-HD MA 5.1 and LPCM 2.0 audio that is suitably raucous when the leathery monster attacks. Extras include a commentary, 45-minute *Making of...* and four additional featurettes. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Hell Ride

Warner Home Video → All-Region BD
£23 Approx



Bikes, beer and babes are the order of the day in this grindhouse throwback 'presented' by

Quentin Tarantino. *Hell Ride* doesn't do anything new, trotting out a revenge storyline you'll have encountered a thousand times before, but if you're an aging biker still dreaming of the open road you could do worse than take this for a spin.

The BD itself scores highly in the AV department, with vivid AVC 2.35:1 imagery and throaty Dolby TrueHD 5.1 sonics. The only extras are a quartet of featurettes and the trailer. The chat track from the US BD is absent. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Ghost in the Shell 2.0

Manga → All-Region BD
£25 Approx



This classic slice of cyberpunk arrives on Blu-ray in slightly re-jigged form.

Director Mamoru Oshii has masterminded an overhaul of the original, replacing key sequences with new CG material and re-recording some of the dialogue. The new CG footage looks great, but sits oddly within the film. The AVC 1.78:1 imagery doesn't scream HD, either, although it's a major step-up from earlier lacklustre DVD transfers. The new DTS-HD MA 6.1 and LPCM 2.0 mixes (in both Japanese and English) are commendable. Extras include the original cut. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Dino-poor

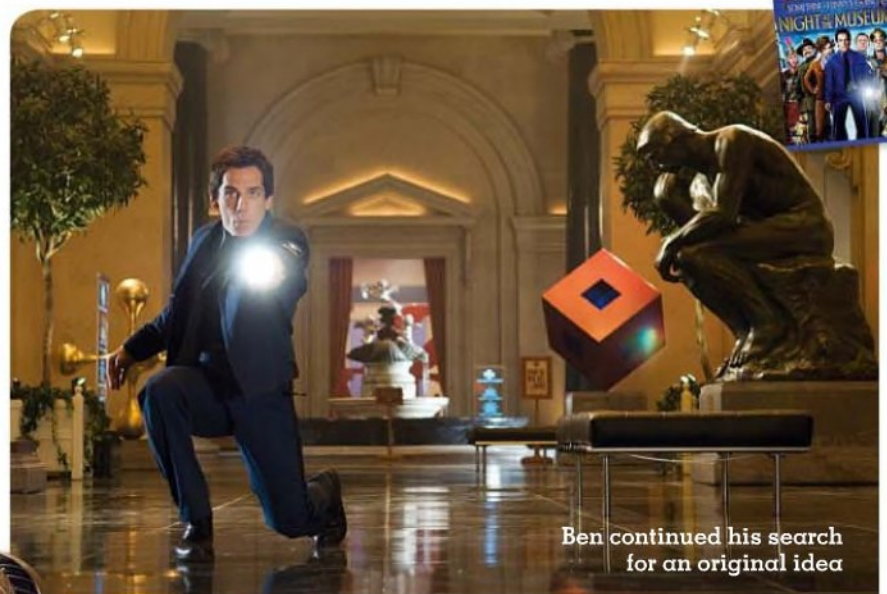
Despite a great cast, this sequel is Stiller not funny

Night at the Museum 2 is best summed up by its director Shawn Levy in one of the accompanying featurettes: 'The pitfall of making any sequel, particularly a movie like this, is that it's gonna get bigger, but not better'.

Sadly, that's exactly the trap he and producer/star Ben Stiller fall into here. *NATM2* is big and loud in every way imaginable – and from the endless parade of CG effects it's clear that monstrous piles of cash have been thrown at the screen. But none of this makes it as good as the rather charming original, let alone better.

Rik Henderson: Fox's AVC 2.40:1 Blu-ray transfer delivers everything you'd expect from a major studio release. The colour palette is particularly rich and warm, resulting in some rather unnatural-looking fleshtones, but it's definitely in keeping with the movie's visual style. Even when completely stripped of colour (as in the adventure in a black-and-white photo in Chapter 11) the imagery is still pin-sharp, packed with detail and featuring excellent contrast.

Steve May: For reasons that escape me, the T-Rex fetch sequence from *NATM* has become a demo staple; it tends to crop up wherever AV systems are demonstrated. Is there anything comparable in this sequel? Not really, although Alan Silvestri's score is jaunty and pleasing enough – and the clarity is such that you'll often think you can place all 103-pieces in the orchestra.



Ben continued his search for an original idea

Overall, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is as polished as brass, but it favours the front of the soundstage. There's some multichannel dressing, but not enough to warrant overmuch attention.

Anton van Beek: This Blu-ray edition comes packaged with an additional DVD copy of the movie, and a Digital Copy to watch on the go.

The BD itself holds a standard set of extras including a brace of audio commentaries, various featurettes, in-character interviews, 12 deleted scenes and a gag reel (all of which, except two of the Fox Movie Channel featurettes, are in 1080p). The big Blu-ray extra is a rather dull BD-Java *Scavenger Hunt* game that kiddies can play while watching the film.



HCC VERDICT

Night at the Museum 2
20th Century Fox → Region B/C
BD → £25 Approx

We say: Lacklustre family fare on a Blu-ray disc that's neat and tidy – but does nothing special in AV terms

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Hail Caesar!

Why can't all TV be this good?

Rome: The Complete Collection

brings together both seasons of HBO's award-winning swords 'n' sandals series. This ambitious British-American-Italian production follows the adventures of soldiers Lucius Vorenus (Kevin McKidd) and Titus Pullo (Ray Stevenson) as their lives become entwined with key events in Roman history from Caesar's invasion of Gaul to the death of Marc Anthony and the rise of Emperor Augustus. Gripping TV that sadly proved too expensive to keep going beyond a meagre 22 episodes.

Mark Craven: Straight from the stylised opening credits, HBO's 1.78:1 AVC encode is a reminder of how good hi-def TV material can look. Colours are impressive, with the picture frequently packed with vivid indigo blues and bright reds, and the high level of detail gives the sun-drenched, dusty locations a tangible quality. A tasty amount of film grain is also present, although some of the wide-open skies can look buzzy. Quality does fluctuate, too: external crowd-filled shots almost uniformly dazzle, but a few dimly-lit interior scenes seem flat. Despite that, it looks a darn sight better than *Neighbours*.

Steve May: HBO's ambitious mini-series sets out to turn every home cinema into the Coliseum. The DTS-HD MA mix positions you in the centre of conflicts, rather than panning FX from front to back. Swords slash and clash in the rears, as action is played out sonically in the round; the lush score by Jeff Beal (taking a break from *Ugly Betty*) is well integrated into this surround mix.

However, *Rome* never really convinces as a cinematic experience – the dialogue often seems disconnected in tone and positioning, separated by a sense of ADR. On the plus side, this does make the dialogue very easy to follow, regardless how you choose to watch.

Anton van Beek: If I have one big complaint about HBO's ten-disc set is that there's not much in the way of exclusive content – pretty much everything outside of the *Bloodlines* function (allowing you to check how characters are related to each other while watching the show) has surfaced before on DVD. These remaining extras are previews for all 22 episodes, commentaries for 13 episodes, five historical documentaries, a *Making of...* featurette, two scene deconstructions and an *All Roads Lead to Rome* pop-up trivia track for each episode.



HCC VERDICT

Rome: The Complete Collection → HBO Video
All-Region BD → £70 Approx
We say: Killed before its time, this BD box at least ensures that *Rome* lives on in style

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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'reproduction of colours remained bright and vivid throughout... detail and depth of field impressed too. It could only be top marks for this one.'
What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision

Gibson's highland fling

Ah. A back catalogue Blu-ray worth getting yourself hung, drawn and quartered for...



Braveheart is a rollicking epic that proves you can play fast and loose with history as long as you give audiences enough spectacle and action. Mel Gibson stars as William Wallace, the man who would come to lead the downtrodden Scots (hooray) against the evil English (boo! hiss!) – but this movie is more important for showcasing Gibson's directorial talents, and the fondness for blood and guts that would serve him well in his next flick, *The Passion of the Christ*.

Mark Craven: I've never been particularly fond of Gibson's Caledonian caper (I prefer *Apocalypto*), but I'll admit that it looks splendid on Fox's BD. There's a bit of print damage and dust present in the image, and the occasional soft shot, but other than that the AVC 2.40:1 picture is hard to fault. The colour palette is rich and earthy, and detailing is excellent even when the action and editing reaches breakneck pace. Wonderful stuff.

Steve May: *Braveheart's* DTS-HD MA 5.1 presentation is as warm and familiar as William Wallace's sporran. The evocative score, surely a career highlight from James Horner, pours like hot, syrupy porridge around the soundfield while scale and detail is spread high and wide. It's a classy, layered conventional mix that doesn't disappoint. To experience home cinema at its most

majestic, dial up one of the epic confrontations – Chapter 10 and the Battle of Stirling is a good place to start. The LFE rumble of the approaching English cavalry, the clatter of chain mail and weaponry and the rousing score combine to make the heart beat faster and the mouth run dry. Paint yourself blue and enjoy.

Anton van Beek: This Fifteenth Anniversary release comes with two discs. In terms of extras, Disc One only offers up a commentary by director/star Mel Gibson, and a picture-in-picture track dubbed *William Wallace's World* that provides additional historical info relating to the locations and people involved. Disc

Two kicks off with the informative *Battlefields of the Scottish Rebellion*, an interactive map allowing viewers to learn more about four of the major battles via CG recreations. Elsewhere, the 30-minute *Tales of William Wallace* attempts to separate the fact from the fiction surrounding the Scottish hero, while the 22-minute *A Writer's Journey* gives screenwriter Randall Wallace the chance to talk about developing the script. Rounding out the set are a 50-minute three-part *Making of...*, a collection of seven cast interviews and a photo montage.

Michael Bolton was a keen member of the East Kilbride Re-enactment Society



HCC VERDICT

Braveheart: XV Anniversary → 20th Century Fox
All-region BD → £23 Approx

We say: Mel Gibson's mud 'n' blood-soaked Oscar-winner makes a thunderous debut in hi-def

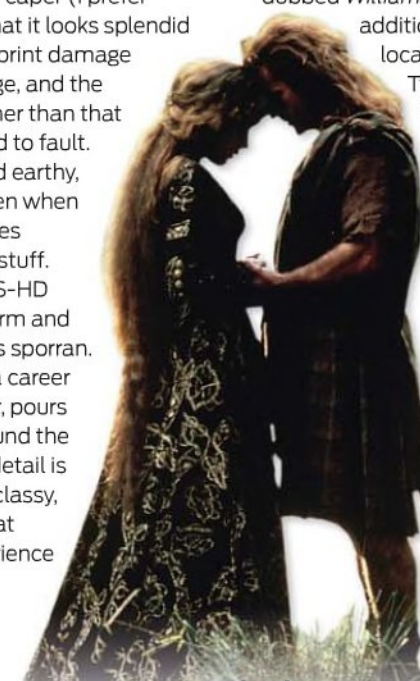
Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



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Jack's back on track

This long-running series has found a new head of steam

24: Season Seven finds Keifer Sutherland's action-adventure TV series bouncing back after a couple of disappointing seasons. The two-year gap since the airing of the sixth run has allowed the writers to fine-tune the storylines and, while still prone to ludicrous twists, Jack Bauer is back at his best, standing up to a Senate investigation into his methods and helping the FBI track a former colleague-turned-terrorist. Great stuff – let's just hope they can keep the momentum (and quality) for Season Eight.

Mark Craven: The very nature of 24's aesthetics mean the show is never going to blow you away in hi-def. However, even with this in mind, I'm still surprised by how flat the imagery looks on this Blu-ray release. Presented as AVC 1.78:1 encodes, the 24 episodes (spread across six discs) suffer from an excess of grain and digital noise, as well as an abundance of crushed blacks and washed-out colours.

Steve May: Although there tends to be clear divisions in sound design between episodic TV and theatrical releases, dictated by both budget and the realisation that most viewers will consume TV shows via poor quality TV speakers, there are exceptions. 24 is one of them, making extensive use of multichannel sound placement and generous LFE. Here, in DTS-HD MA 5.1 guise, you get to hear it sounding better than when broadcast. The score is insistent and exciting while the action sequences clatter and rattle. Overall, a lot of fun.

Anton van Beek: Extras brought across from the US release include commentaries for 12



Jack and pals practice 'mean and moody'

episodes, a live performance of music from the show, a featurette highlighting the creation of a scene from episode 19, 15 deleted scenes (with optional commentary) and an excellent *Making of...* featurette exploring the various changes the season went through. New to this UK release (presumably to make up for us waiting an extra five months for it!) are the two-part 24 in 24 promotional featurette and a mountain of behind-the-scenes vignettes. It's just a shame they didn't see fit to also add the feature-length prologue, 24: *Redemption* to the set as well, as that might have justified the box's hefty price-tag.



HCC VERDICT

24: Season Seven Blu-ray Collection → 20th Century Fox → All-Region BD
£74 Approx

We say: This explosive TV series sounds great on Blu-ray

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Shaun of the Dead

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Easily the best rom-zom-com you'll ever see, Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright's love letter to the

undead remains a treat – despite an over-familiarity born of endless TV screenings here in the UK. Finally arriving on Blu-ray, *SotD* looks delicious thanks to a sharp and filmic AVC 2.35:1 encode, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is rich and detailed. Extras are ridiculously comprehensive, including U-Control storyboards and 'Zomb-O-Meter', four commentaries, video diaries, deleted scenes, the 2000AD prequel comic and much, much more. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Hot Fuzz

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Having sent up the horror genre with *Shaun of the Dead*, Pegg and Edgar then turned their attention

to the Jerry Bruckheimer school of action movies. The results are equally impressive, packing in plenty of astute gags around a gripping storyline. In fitting with the subject matter, the VC-1 2.40:1 encode and DTS-HD 5.1 audio are both sensational – the former sharp, the latter pounding you with deep bass and surround effects. Extras-wise, everything from the feature-packed R2 DVD is here, plus the *Fuzzball Rally* documentary from the R1 DVD and U-Control functionality. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

12 Monkeys

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£20 Approx



Terry Gilliam's accessible and commercially successful thriller appears on Blu-ray,

but some might be less than impressed at how it comes across in hi-def. The stumbling block is the inconsistent VC-1 1.85:1 encode; close-ups reveal it to be a step-up from DVD incarnations, but it rarely registers the impressive detailing we expect from HD, thanks to murky presentation and heavy grain structure. More satisfying are the improved audio clarity afforded by the new DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix and the inclusion of both a director's commentary and a candid 87-minute *Making of...* doc. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Avengers: The Complete Series 2

Optimum → R2 DVD
£80 Approx



After years in licensing hell, the cult TV series returns to DVD in the UK. This first eight-disc set

serves up episodes never released on DVD over here in the form of all 26 episodes from the second run, as well as the surviving material from the first series. The 4:3 picture has been wonderfully restored (but is still at the mercy of the source material) and generous extras include commentaries, interviews, scripts, stills galleries and even a bonus episode from the related '60s TV series *Police Surgeon*. **CJ**

1 2 3 4 5

The Last Battle

Optimum → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Before he hit it big in the UK and US with some of the other films reviewed here, French director Luc

Besson found fame in his home country with this curious low-budget black-and-white post-apocalyptic drama. While too arty for its own good (there's next to no dialogue in the entire film), Besson completists and die-hard fans should give it a go.

Optimum's AVC 2.35:1 encode has some obvious edge enhancement, and the French PCM 2.0 audio lacks dynamic impact (although it is nice and clear). The sole extra is a re-release trailer for the film. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Subway

Optimum → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Besson's second feature film might very well be the most '80s movie ever made – all big

hairdos, excessive make-up and huge shoulder pads. What's worse, though, is that it's also exactly the kind of self-indulgent and painfully hip movie full of wacky characters that you'd expect from an upstart director trying to make a name for himself. Blu-ray presentation is average; the AVC 2.35:1 imagery looks soft and lacks fine detailing, while the French PCM 2.0 audio is solid if rather unadventurous. Once again, a standard-definition trailer is the sole extra feature. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The Big Blue: Director's Cut

Optimum → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Notable for being Luc Besson's first English language film, it soon becomes apparent

that there's a big problem with Optimum's Blu-ray release – it only features the French dub! What a real shame, as elsewhere this 168-minute epic about competing free divers stands proud in hi-def, with a gorgeous AVC 2.35:1 picture that renders the Mediterranean locations almost tangible. Quality extras include the shorter theatrical cut (with Dolby stereo rather than the PCM 2.0 of the Director's Cut), and *Making of...* documentary. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

Nikita

Optimum → Region B BD
£25 Approx



English-speaking audiences finally opened their arms to Luc Besson with the arrival of this 1990

actioner. *My Fair Lady* with guns, *Nikita* deals with a young drug addict who kills a cop and is sentenced to life in prison, only to catch the eye of a government spook who thinks she'd be ideal as a top-secret assassin. Cracking stuff – and it looks great in HD courtesy of a vibrant AVC 2.35:1 encode. The PCM 2.0 French-language audio is suitably dynamic given the limitations of the source material. Extras include a documentary, the trailer and pointless 30-second interview snippets. **AvB**

1 2 3 4 5

The hitman and her

Meet the undisputed leader of the Assassin Nation!

Léon is the pinnacle of Luc Besson's filmmaking career (although some would argue for sci-fi actioner *The Fifth Element*). The perfect distillation of the themes and ideas he explored in his earlier movies, this tale of an illiterate professional killer and the orphaned girl he takes under his wing is intelligent, savvy and satisfying.

This hi-def release marks the UK debut of the so-called Director's Cut, which is actually the French theatrical release. It adds around 23 minutes to the running time and improves the film immeasurably, principally by fleshing out the curious relationship between Jean Reno's Léon and Natalie Portman's precocious Mathilda.

Anton van Beek: Internet forums have already exploded with opinion regarding the relative merits (or otherwise) of *Léon*'s AVC 2.35:1 encode. Some argue that the imagery is no better than that of the earlier French and German Blu-rays, with all of the blooming contrast, over-cooked hues and other issues they displayed. However, while some edge enhancement is still present and brightness is a bit hot on this UK disc, I reckon colours are milder and there's a stronger sense of film grain in the image. It's still not perfect, but for my money it's the best version currently available.

Steve May: *Léon* offers two audio choices: a DTS-HD MA 5.1 surround mix or two-channel PCM. The multichannel mix is actually quite subtle, even when weapons are discharging, but offers a welcome sense of presence and body missing from the two-channel option. Technically, the disc is as crisp as a well-baked baguette. And I like baguettes.

Rik Henderson: The first extra is the 100-minute Theatrical Cut of the film itself, which is only accessible through the Special Features menu. Visually there's little difference between this 1080p AVC encode and the one for the main Director's Cut, although I believe the Theatrical Cut's DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is slightly more aggressive.

The remaining extras are all culled from the old Deluxe Edition R1 DVD and are presented in 576p. These take the form of a 25-minute retrospective documentary, lengthy interviews with Natalie Portman and Jean Reno, and the theatrical trailer. Nothing that really makes use of the added skills of the Blu-ray format.



Wii peripherals are becoming more realistic all the time



HCC VERDICT

Léon: Special Edition
Optimum → Region B BD
£25 Approx

We say: Minor image issues aside, this is undoubtedly the best Besson's thriller has ever looked or sounded

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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| Mon Audio Radius R90 HD10 | £1269 | (SRP £1272) |

SCREENS

More at www.SSAV.com

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|---------------------|------|-------------|
| Philips 32PFL7404 | £579 | (SRP £649) |
| Panasonic TX-L37S10 | £599 | (SRP £699) |
| Philips 42PFL9664 | £WEB | (SRP £1499) |
| Samsung UE46B8000 | £WEB | (SRP £2099) |

HI-FI CD PLAYERS

More at www.SSAV.com

| | | |
|----------------|-------|-------------|
| Marantz CD6003 | £WEB | (SRP £299) |
| Arcam FMJ CD17 | £WEB | (SRP £600) |
| Cyrus CD 6 SE | £899 | (SRP £900) |
| Cyrus CD 8 SE | £1199 | (SRP £1200) |

HI-FI AMPLIFIERS

More at www.SSAV.com

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|-----------------|-------|-------------|
| Marantz PM6003 | £WEB | (SRP £299) |
| Cyrus 6 XP | £899 | (SRP £900) |
| Cyrus 8 XP d | £1499 | (SRP £1500) |
| Leema Tucana II | £3399 | (SRP £3425) |

HI-FI SPEAKERS

More at www.SSAV.com

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|--------------------------|-------|-------------|
| Wharfedale Diamond 10.1 | £199 | (SRP £199) |
| B&W 685 | £369 | (SRP £371) |
| Monitor Audio Silver RX6 | £749 | (SRP £750) |
| Spendor A6 | £1989 | (SRP £1995) |

SYSTEMS

More at www.SSAV.com

| | | |
|--------------------|------|-------------|
| Denon D-M37DAB | £199 | (SRP £229) |
| Panasonic SC-BT200 | £479 | (SRP £499) |
| Arcam Solo Mini | £WEB | (SRP £750) |
| Teac Reference 600 | £999 | (SRP £1000) |

PLEASE NOTE Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO). ADVERT VALID UNTIL 13/11/2009, E&OE.

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Bromley 020 8290 1988
Cambridge 01223 304770
Chelsea 020 7352 9466
Cheltenham 01242 241171
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Exeter 01392 218895
Glasgow 0141 332 9655
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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

End region coding!

First off, I love Blu-ray. I recently purchased *Zulu* and was blown away by the picture – it was like it was filmed yesterday, really stunning. I don't use my Blu-ray player to go online, this doesn't really interest me. I think what people want is region-free. I have a couple of UK Blu-rays that are clearly from the US (the FBI threat comes up before the movie), so what is the point of region coding?

If the film studios really want to stamp out piracy, then release all titles in all regions at the same time (I know some films are owned by different studios, but these are only a small fraction). I believe the first Blu-ray manufacturer to release a region-free Blu-ray player will make a killing on the market place.

Paul, via email



Yamaha's YSP-40D is one of the most convincing soundbars available

We agree that region coding is a source of irritation, but it's nowhere as bad as it is with DVDs. In fact, we've been pleasantly surprised by the amount of discs that are being sold region-free, especially with the likes of

Warner Home Video abolishing coding on all its Blu-rays – up 'til now, anyway.

However, we agree that region-free Blu-ray decks will sell like hotcakes. You could check out the Oppo BDP-831 (reviewed on p70), which can

be made region-free with a third-party modification.

Surround solution

I have a Panasonic 65in plasma TV and a Blu-ray cinema system with tallboy speakers, but my daughter has wrecked



Playback problems – BD-Live to blame?

Hello, I'd like to make you aware of a major issue with the new release of *Crank 2* on Blu-ray. It seems that anybody attempting to play this disc in budget Blu-ray players (i.e. those without significant internal memory) or without latest firmwares (requiring the player to be internet-connected) will be unable to do so.

My personal experience was no picture on any of the three Samsung players in my home, and a web search proved that I am not alone by any means. My search term was 'Crank 2 no picture' – try it and the forum threads will reveal the true extent of this problem, which stems from the distributor's desire to try and maintain some kind of control over the title beyond the point of sale in the form of an EULA.

If you do decide to research this I'd be interested to know your opinion.

Simon Burnett, via email

Simon, this is something that we've also noticed with a couple of our team's players. We contacted Lionsgate and this was its response: 'There has been some concern surrounding the playability of the recently-released Blu-ray of *Crank 2: High Voltage*. The difficulties that are being experienced are not with the disc itself but with certain Profile 2.0 Blu-ray players that do not contain internal memory.



To rectify the problem all you need is to add external memory (1GB is more than sufficient). The large majority of Blu-ray players will contain this as default, but if your player doesn't have it, you are likely to experience problems. The most effective solution is to either purchase a USB stick or an SD card depending on what's compatible with your player, and to connect it; the instructions for this should be outlined in your player's instruction manual. For playback of the disc, please ensure that there is at least 16 MB of free space on the card/stick. To fully enjoy the features of Lionsgate Live, like downloadable trailers, ringtones, and screensavers, etc, please ensure there is at least 128 MB of free space on the card.'

So that explains it, but doesn't make it any better: Blu-ray owners are

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them! I have my plasma wall-mounted and was wondering which soundbars would give me the same quality sound, perhaps Yamaha's YSP-40D or YAS71 soundbar with subwoofer? There is a different in the price range between these, though. Has HCC tested the YAS71 yet?
Darren, Ireland

The short answer to that is no, we're yet to get our mitts on the YAS71. However, as it is predominantly a 2.1 system, using Yamaha's Air Surround Extreme technology to create a '7.1-effect', we doubt it will offer as believable a surround experience as the YSP-40D, which uses 40 separate drivers to reflect sound off walls. Certainly, we were impressed by the 40D – it's one of the

better soundbars around, and still part of Yamaha's lineup after a year on the shelves.

Also, for an authentic surround system without tallboy speakers that your daughter can damage, have you considered wall-mounted satellites, such as those offered by KEF in its Home Theatre ranges? These could probably be fitted out of reach, but 'toed in' to bolster performance.

Big Beek support

I agree with Anton van Beek. There I've said it! His assessment of the surge towards 3D being less perfect than most commentators would have us believe (DVD Addict, HCC #174) is spot on.

Whilst in the US in June, I took the opportunity to see Pixar's *Up* in 3D, and although I thoroughly enjoyed the film, I was almost scared to tell anyone that the actual visual experience left me disappointed. In still or slow moving scenes the extra depth is definitely there, but with any degree of movement the picture becomes slightly less sharp than I am used to, and consequently I would rather have watched a traditional presentation of the film. Then I would have been gushing with praise for one the best animated films I've seen – rather than feeling it just wasn't quite as good as it could have been.

I am not an old stick-in-the-mud who is resistant to change. In fact, in most cases I fall in the early adopter category. I have embraced Blu-ray, Sky HD and had a large plasma for years. Hell, I even bought my first DVD

player in 1998 when there were only six films released in the UK!. Yet 3D is just not right.

Obviously I have not seen *Avatar* yet, and will no doubt be drawn to the cinema in December in the hope that I am proved wrong, but my experience so far tends to suggest that afterwards I will not be queuing for a 3D television and 3D Blu-ray player!
Richard Blythe, via email

BD-Live DOA?

I would much rather pay a bit more for a version of a movie [on Blu-ray] with no trailers, no claptrap, no irrelevant FBI and piracy warnings, than BD-Live content. That might even provide the space for a better quality encode too.

David Basketter, via HCC online

Where's my TV?

I've been waiting for you guys to do a Philips 9803 review for ages now. However, when I looked on the Philips website the other day, the product had disappeared.

I had a reply from Philips claiming it was part of their 2008/2009 range and has now been discontinued! Eh? It hasn't even appeared in any shops or been reviewed yet.

Do you have any idea what Philips are playing at please?
Mark Allison, via email

We actually reviewed the Philips 42PFL9803H – the company's first LED-backlit TV – back in issue #166 (coverdated April 2009). Although it was reasonably received, there were some concerns with smearing, due to issues with the backlight. Philips has told us that these sets were available in some key independent and department stores until very recently, but were never sold online. However, the entire range is about to be replaced in November by the 9704 ●

Write to Letters, Home Cinema Choice, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW, or email us at hcc@futurenet.co.uk. Due to the volume of letters we receive we cannot guarantee to print/answer them all.

used to being told that not all functionality may be available on particular players, but this is the first disc we have experienced which restricts access to the movie itself.

Bizarrely, owners of older Profile 1.0/1.1 machines will not have a problem with the platter, as that hardware lacks any BD-Live functionality. And naturally, if you own a PS3, the title plays without problems.

Winner: Star Letter-writer Simon Burnett wins copies of *Shaun of the Dead* and *Hot Fuzz* on Blu-ray courtesy of Universal Pictures UK. They're available to buy now, priced around £20 each.

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Seeing is believing

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How easy is it to buy a home cinema system that suits you? You could read the magazine product reviews, find out who sells the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys at the cheapest price and place your order. When the system is delivered to your door in the box, you get a friend who knows his onions to install it - and live happily ever after.

This is a fairly well-trodden path but it leads to dissatisfaction and a lot of wasted money. Besides there being a bewildering choice of components on the market today, there are also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, plasma or LCD, an HD ready set or one with full 1080p capability? And on the audio side do you plump for a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub, and where do you site them for the best results? The choice of home cinema amp raises even more questions. Will you be listening to music through the same system? If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Do you need SACD, DVD-Audio, or Blu-ray capability? How many inputs do you need for video, s-video, component, coaxial digital, optical digital and HDMI? The above are just a small percentage of the decisions that must be made. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

Achieving potential

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer.

This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that **the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis, that is without professional input, are performing at way below their optimum level.** To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity.

Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

What and Where to buy

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ... **don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.

“...without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity”

cinema

LISTED HERE ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY.

Listed on this page are 20 of the best AV shops in the country. They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY



SERVICE



FACILITIES



VERDICT



Buying or being sold to?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to

its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

Getting the best deal

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

system?..

...Ask the experts



OUR TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST AV DEALERS

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent **SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI**

40 High Street. 01233 624441

Chelmsford **RAYLEIGH HI-FI**

216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245

Colchester **RAYLEIGH HI-FI**

33 Sir Isaac's Walk. 01206 577682

Kingston-upon-Thames **INFIDELITY**

9 High Street, Hampton Wick.

020 8943 3530

Maidenhead **AUDIO VENUE**

36 Queen Street. 01628 633995

Rayleigh, Essex **RAYLEIGH HI-FI**

44a High Street. 01268 779762

Custom Install Dept.

01268 776932

Southend-on-Sea **RAYLEIGH HI-FI**

132/4 London Road. 01702 435255

Tunbridge Wells **KENT HOME CINEMA**

69 London Road, Southborough.

01892 535007

LONDON

N1 **GRAHAMS HI-FI**

190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS

61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.

020 7924 2040

Ealing **AUDIO VENUE**

27 Bond Street. 020 7924 2040

MIDLANDS

Coventry **FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE**

163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200

Nottingham **CASTLE SOUND & VISION**

48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404

Solihull **MUSIC MATTERS**

93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254

NORTH

Chester **ACOUSTICA**

17 Hoole Road. 01244 344227

York **SOUND ORGANISATION**

2 Gillygate. 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen **HOLBURN HI-FI**

441 Holburn Street. 01224 585713/572729

Edinburgh **LOUD & CLEAR**

Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Rd.

0131 555 3963

Glasgow **GLASGOW AUDIO**

135 Great Western Road.

0141 332 2200/4707



The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.

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| QED Silver Anniversary XT Bi-Wire | £10.80 per / metre | ★★★★★ | |
| QED Revelation Speaker Cable | £13.50 per / metre | ★★★★★ | |
| QED X-Tube XT-400 Speaker Cable | £20.25 per / metre | ★★★★★ | |
| QED Genesis Speaker Cable | £25.00 per / metre | ★★★★★ | |
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| Does the job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Disappointing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Don't touch it | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

DECEMBER 2009 HOME CINEMA CHOICE

LCD TV

Best on test...



SONY
46in → KDL-46Z5500
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

2009 Z-Series builds upon previous Bravia know-how

Highs: Wonderfully detailed pictures; bright, crisp colours
Lows: Black levels are a tad light; poor off-axis viewing

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 173
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/622541



SAMSUNG
32in → LE32B650
£650 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Net-savvy 32incher is a real bargain buy

Highs: Huge feature count; excellent HD pics; sexy design
Lows: SD performance and audio is average

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 172
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/613346



SAMSUNG
46in → UE-46B8000
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top-flight edge-lit LED panel will sell like hot cakes

Highs: Outstanding picture quality; 200Hz works well
Lows: Some of the settings are awful; limited viewing angle

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/627639



TOSHIBA
42in → 42ZV555D
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Much-touted Resolution+ LCD gives a polish to SD sources

Highs: HD performance; Resolution+ doesn't disappoint
Lows: Uninspired sound and design; no Res+ over HDMI

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p24)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (& analogue & CI slot)

Tested: Issue 165
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/492878



PHILIPS
42in → 42PES0001
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Philips' modular TV drops Ambilight but doesn't suffer

Highs: Sexy form factor and quality build; eye-catching images
Lows: Complex menus

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (to 1080p24)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (& analogue & CI slot)

Tested: Issue 168
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/579400

Also Recommended...



LG
32in → 32LH4000
£460 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Budget offering from LG delivers where it counts

Highs: Exceptional value; good design; connectivity and images
Lows: Black levels; restricted viewing angle; audio is average

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 172
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/613314



SONY
37in → KDL-40W5500
£900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent LCD all-rounder

Highs: Impressive dynamic contrast and smooth motion; networking features
Lows: Styling is bland; AppliCast needs more content

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 171
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/604105



SAMSUNG
55in → LE55A956D
£2,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Monster-sized LED screen won an HCC Best Buy award

Highs: Awesome contrasty picture; multimedia functions
Lows: Not as skinny as its more recent LED rivals

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes, (& CI slot)

Tested: Issue 163
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/476857

Editor's Choice...

PHILIPS
56in → Cinema 21:9
£4,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Philips' groundbreaking ultra widescreen TV needs to be seen to be believed. It's deceptively large (about as wide as a traditional 65in TV) and genuinely brings a sense of cinema to your 2.35:1 movies. Expanded 16:9 material is surprisingly watchable, too. There are other frills here – Ambilight, 200Hz processing, five HDMI inputs, Net TV and DLNA certification – but it's the forward-thinking design and technology of the 21:9 that will blow you away. Whether the concept takes hold remains to be seen, though.

Tested: Issue 171
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/607940

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
2560 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 5
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (and CI slot)

Plasma TV

Best on test...



PIONEER
60in → KRP-600A
£5,000 Approx



Kuro with separate media box, Ethernet and satellite tuner

Highs: Awesome black levels; colour accuracy; slim panel; media-savvy
Lows: Problems with AVI files

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot and DVB-S2 tuner)

Tested: Issue 164
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/487206



PANASONIC
65in → TX-P65V10B
£4,500 Approx



Currently the biggest, bestest plasma you can buy

Highs: High-impact bigscreen pictures; Freesat HD
Lows: Lack of manual colour temp controls; sucks electricity

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus Freesat tuner and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/631206



PANASONIC
50in → TX-P50V10B
£1,900 Approx



THX-certified, Viera Cast-touting NeoPDP

Highs: THX mode is stunning out of the box; good feature set
Lows: Unspectacular black level response; a bit chunky

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus Freesat tuner and CI slot)

Tested: Issue 171
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/604030



PIONEER
50in → PDP-LX5090
£2,500 Approx



Baby brother of the LX6090 Kuro panel

Highs: Unbelievable contrast and black levels; superb detail
Lows: Speakers are an optional extra only

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 3 (2 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 159
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/417409



LG
32in → 32PG6000
£500 Approx



World's smallest 32in plasma challenges LCD rivals

Highs: Smooth movement; good blacks and connectivity
Lows: Lack of detail; some jagged edges; average audio

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus analogue)

Tested: Issue 162
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/467207

Also Recommended...



LG
50in → 50PG6000
£1,100 Approx



Superb HD Ready plasma offering great value for money

Highs: Extensive calibration possibilities; excellent black level; sexy bezel
Lows: Not Full HD

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1366 x 768 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 4
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: 1
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 154
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/241069



PANASONIC
37in → TH-37PX80
£650 Approx



Small PDP from Panasonic continues the Viera vibe

Highs: Beautiful blacks; natural colours; good GUI
Lows: HDMI v1.2 inputs lack DeepColor support

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes
1024 x 720 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3 (v1.2)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes

Tested: Issue 162
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/322863



SAMSUNG
50in → PS50A556
£1,000 Approx



Bargain-priced monster screen with a few caveats

Highs: Superb specification; great build quality; sharp detail
Lows: Some motion artefacts and noise visible

→ Specifications

HD Ready: Yes (up to 1080p)
1920 x 1080 resolution
No. of HDMI inputs: 3
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (1 RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (plus CI slot)

Tested: Issue 161
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/463634

Editor's Choice...

PANASONIC
46in → TX-P46Z1
£4,300 Approx



THX certification, full 1080p wireless transmission, ultra-thin design...

Panasonic's flagship plasma TV is a giant leap forward for the display technology. Add in the Freesat HD tuner, Viera Cast and DLNA networkability and stunning HD and SD pictures and you begin to understand the premium price tag. Some might argue that its black levels aren't as jaw-dropping as a Pioneer Kuro – but those screens aren't being made any more. The Z1 is simply the best plasma TV you can buy.

Tested: Issue 172
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/613213

→ Specifications

HD Ready: yes (up to 1080p/24)
Native resolution: 1920 x 1080
No. of HDMI inputs: 4 (v1.3)
No. of Scart inputs: 2 (RGB)
No. of component inputs: 1
PC input: Yes
Digital tuner: Yes (and Freesat)



Blu-ray Players

Best on test...



PIONEER
Blu-ray → BDP-LX91
£1,800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference status BD deck is also a first-rate CD and DVD player

Highs: Stunning picture; great sound; packed with features and well-designed

Lows: Precision Quartz Lock System works with CDs only

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet

Tested: Issue 167
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/532605



SAMSUNG
Blu-ray → BD-P3600
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Top-level Samsung BD spinner

Highs: Impressive pics and sound; 7.1-channel output; DivX HD playback

Lows: No WMA support; PC streaming tricky to set up; Wi-Fi requires dongle

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, Wi-Fi via supplied dongle, USB

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/629198



LG
Blu-ray → BD390
£290 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Improved players sports more features than BD370

Highs: Excellent performance; 1GB internal storage; Wi-Fi net connection, 7.1 analogue outputs

Lows: Audio can't match its premium BD rivals

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet/Wi-Fi (including YouTube), USB

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/631706



PANASONIC
Blu-ray → DMP-BD80
£350 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Flagship 2009 deck adds YouTube fun to top-class specs

Highs: Full multichannel outputs; superb, detailed images; net functionality

Lows: Uninspired design; sluggish loading times

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet, VieraCast, SD card slot, USB 2.0

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/592252



SONY
Blu-ray → PS3 Slim
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The new Slim version of the PS3 adds some AV improvements

Highs: HD gaming, heaps of internal memory; bitstreaming of HD audio

Lows: Hungry for electricity; remote control costs extra

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (via proprietary dongle)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: 2 USB, Ethernet, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth

Tested: Issue 174
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/631210

Editor's Choice...

SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S5000ES → £1,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



Sony has finally released a standalone Blu-ray deck that's comfortably better than its PlayStation 3 console. This £1,200 entry into the brand's Elevated Standard component range is a cinephile-grade machine with full Profile 2.0 support, internal decoding and bitstreaming of DTS-HD and Dolby TrueHD and best-in-class build quality. Pictures are immensely satisfying and its aural performance is exquisite. Well worth an audition if you're serious about BD.

Tested: Issue 166
For price check visit: www.techradar.com/503019

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (7.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No/No
Networkability: MicroVault card slot; LAN port

Also Recommended



SAMSUNG
Blu-ray → BD-P4600
£260 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Wall-mountable deck with Wi-Fi dongle option

Highs: Original styling; slim proportions; fast disc-loading; good multimedia management

Lows: Average DVD scaling; limited connectivity

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 2.0
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: No
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/Yes
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Ethernet (Wi-Fi dongle is optional for an extra £50) USB

Tested: Issue 169
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/592233



YAMAHA
Blu-ray → BD-S2900
£700 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

High-end BD debut from Yamaha lacks HD decoding

Highs: BD picture; build quality; CD performance; fast loading

Lows: DVD playback only average; noisy; not Profile 2.0

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 1.1
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (5.1)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: No/No
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: SD card slot

Tested: Issue 162
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/467581



SONY
Blu-ray → BDP-S350
£250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

'BD-Live Ready deck' still not quite the finished article

Highs: Good picture quality; decent sound; efficient DVD upscaling

Lows: Needs to be updated to BD-Live; DTS via bitstream only

→ Specifications

Blu-ray profile: 1.1 (2.0 via upgrade)
DVD upscaling: Up to 1080p
Analogue audio output: Yes (stereo only)
Onboard Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA decoding: Yes/No
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD MA bitstream output: Yes/Yes
DVD-A/SACD playback: No
Networkability: Yes, via Ethernet, USB

Tested: Issue 161
For price check visit:
www.techradar.com/460426



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AV Receivers

Best on test...



PIONEER
AVR → SC-LX81
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

ICE-powered AIR Studios-tuned AVR now replaced by SC-LX82

Highs: Stunning sound; performs well over spec; tank-like build

Lows: Pioneer doesn't do height/width processing

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes, 2
THX certification: THX Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/532595



SONY
AVR → STR-DA5400ES
£1,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Class-leading mid-priced AVR with power and poise

Highs: Excellent build; audiophile SACD and CD playback; full of power

Lows: No Ethernet port, THX certification or DAB radio

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 120W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: No
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 5-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/503066



ONKYO
AVR → TX-SR607
£500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Mid-range HD receiver with Dolby 'Height' processing

Highs: Excellent onscreen display; twin subwoofer outputs

Lows: Dolby Pro-Logic IIz not as versatile as Audyssey DSX

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 145W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes (stereo audio only)
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 2
HDMI: 6-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: No

Tested: Issue 170

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/596948



DENON
AVR → AVR-4310
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Audyssey DSX-toting AVR will change the way you think about speaker placement

Highs: Awesome sound as standard; extra width and height channels are a boon

Lows: Lacks the 9.1 DSX option

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 130W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/623954



DENON
AVR → AVR-2309
£600 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Mid-range HD audio unit lacks networking but sounds superb

Highs: Fabulous balance with HD audio; punchy sound with CDs; powerful

Lows: No networking and only 1 HDMI output

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 100W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 162

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/466939

Editor's Choice...

ARCAM
AVR → SC-LX81
£3,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



British manufacturer Arcam arrived late to the HD audio party, but the AVR600 is certainly worth the wait. Utilising a Class G analogue amplifier, this silver machine is cool-running and efficient, while an entire 'root and branch' overhaul of multichannel AV amp design has allowed Arcam to tackle audio jitter head on. Yet this isn't purely an audiophile product – it's packed with custom install features, offers an insane array of connections, and delivers Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD MA Blu-ray mixes with aplomb. A class act from a classic brand.

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/613252

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 120W (8Ω)
Upscaling to HDMI: Yes
Tuner: DAB/AM/FM
Dolby TrueHD/DTS-HD: Yes/Yes
Zone 2: Yes and Zone 3
Serial port control: Yes, 2
THX certification: No
Component input: 5
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Also Recommended...



NAD
AVR → T747
£1,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent AVR offers more grunt than its specs suggest

Highs: Storming all-round performance; eases you into every film; simple to use

Lows: No Ethernet or USB inputs; DAB costs extra

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 60W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes (AM/FM)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 4-in, 1-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/629727



ONKYO
AVR → TX-NR906
£1,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

THX Ultra2 Plus AVR with ISF tweakery is Onkyo's flagship

Highs: Powerful; superb video processor; full-on up front sound; networkability

Lows: Operational issues; build quality could be better

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 200W (6Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: Yes
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes and 3
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: Ultra2 Plus
Component input: 3
HDMI: 6-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (7.1)

Tested: Issue 164

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/476747



YAMAHA
Amp → DSP-27
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Trimmed-down version of the award-winning Z11

Highs: Large sound with huge bass and plenty of detail

Lows: Orange display; disconcerting pops when changing sources

→ Specifications

Power: 7 x 140W (8Ω)
Upscaling via HDMI: Yes
Tuner: No ('net only)
Dolby TrueHD: Yes
DTS-HD: Yes
Zone 2: Yes, and 3 & 4
Serial port control: Yes
THX certification: No
Component input: 3
HDMI: 5-in, 2-out (v1.3)
Multichannel input: Yes (5.1)

Tested: Issue 172

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/612358

Projectors

Best on test...



SIM2
DLP → Grand Cinema
C3X 1080
£23,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Reference-status PJ with brilliant colour management

Highs: Gorgeous design; small form factor; dazzling pictures

Lows: SD processing isn't quite hi-end enough for the price

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): NA
Contrast (claimed): 10,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 169

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/591731



EPSON
LCD → EH-TW3800
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A flawless example of cutting-edge 1080p LCD PJ technology

Highs: Quiet in operation; looks classy; superb picture; easy setup

Lows: Higher-end rivals deliver deeper black levels

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 18,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/527031



JVC
D-ILA → HD350
£3,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Fantastically filmic PJ is a steal at £3,500

Highs: Stunning picture quality; runs quietly; easy and flexible to setup

Lows: No direct PC hookup; DLP rivals may be brighter

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 30,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/532631



OPTOMA
DLP → Themescene HD82
£2,500 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A tasty development of a distinguished product line

Highs: Good blacks levels; impressive colour performance; easy to set up

Lows: Some dynamic iris noise; some DLP rainbow effects

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2 x v1.3
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,300 ANSI Lumens
Contrast (claimed): 20,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 26dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/620868



PANASONIC
LCD → PT-AE3000
£2,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Excellent all-rounder packed with user-friendly features

Highs: Good black level, contrast and colours; flexibility; quiet running

Lows: Needs tweaking for best results; no 12V trigger

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 3
Component inputs: 2
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 60,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 22dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/503174

Also Recommended...



CINEVERSUM
LCoS → BlackWing One
£4,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Sexily-styled French LCoS model undercuts JVC and Sony

Highs: Sharp; colourful images; versatile setup and installation options

Lows: Average black level lets the BlackWing One down

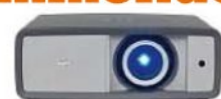
Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,200 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 2,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/630706



SANYO
LCD → PLV-Z3000
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Solid HD performer with a few minor niggles

Highs: Flexible lens settings; quiet operation; tasty price

Lows: Lacks basic niceties like a 12V trigger and remote focus; black levels aren't best in class

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 2
D-Sub: Yes
Brightness (claimed): 1,600 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 65,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): N/A
Fan noise: 19dB
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/532622



VIVITEK
DLP → H9080FD
£10,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

The world's first 'lampless' LED projector

Highs: Excellent colour fidelity; great definition; long lifespan

Lows: Lacks brightness; early adopters pay for the innovative LED tech

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
D-Sub: No, use HDMI instead for PC hookup
Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 15,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 4,000 hours
Fan noise: NA
24fps: Yes

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/620783

Editor's Choice...

SONY
SXR → VPL-VW850
£5,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5



The successor to the well-received VW80 again shows that Sony's SXR-branded LCoS wizardry can take on any challengers in the high-end projector market. The copious picture tweaks available mean achieving a truly cinematic picture is a doddle; the astonishing contrast ratio and detail levels help, too. Add in the 12V trigger, bundled gamma adjustment software and near silent running, and we reckon this could become an installers' fave.

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/627126

→ Specifications

1920 x 1080 resolution
HDMI inputs: 2
Component inputs: 1
PC compatibility: VGA
Brightness (claimed): 800 ANSI lumens
Contrast (claimed): 120,000:1
Lamp life (claimed): 3,000 hours
Fan noise: 20dB
24fps: Yes

Subwoofers

Best on test...



BK
SW → XLS200
£290 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

10in driver married to high- and line-level inputs

Highs: Deep and extended output; disproportionately powerful; compact

Lows: Bland styling

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 22Hz-100Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 275W
Driver: 10in
Weight: 12.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 151

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/249083



MARTINLOGAN
SW → Descent I
£3,250 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Weapons-grade unit with 3 x 10in woofers

Highs: Superb engineering; Reference standard performance

Lows: Bulky and premium-priced; no automated setup

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18Hz-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 500W
Driver: 3 x 10in
Weight: 47.7kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: No
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 167

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/532655



BOWERS & WILKINS
SW → ASW608
£300 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Compact subwoofer ideal for smaller rooms

Highs: Excellent grip and musical low-end control

Lows: Limited by its size

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 23Hz-140Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 200W
Driver: 8in
Weight: 8.85kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: No

Tested: Issue 160

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/423217



VELODYNE
SW → DD-10
£1,900 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

We love the see-thru version of this excellent bass shifter

Highs: Thrilling performance, special edition finishes

Lows: You can get more muscle for the money

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 18-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,250W
Driver: 10in
Weight: 26kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 158

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/381347



VELODYNE
SW → SPL-1200 Ultra
From £1,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent sub – now with custom finish options

Highs: Tight, powerful bass; useful auto-calibration

Lows: Few added benefits over the step-down model

→ Specifications

Frequency response: 21-120Hz (claimed)
Amplifier: 1,200W
Driver: 12in
Weight: 22kg
Enclosure: Sealed
On-board equaliser: Yes
Remote control: Yes

Tested: Issue 172

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/613234

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Code KLAB20MDC5

£179.99

KLAB20D

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Code KLAB20MDC8

£184.99

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For more products, new ranges and bargains visit www.keene.co.uk



Easy Icon Universal Remote

Really easy to set up and use universal remote for ten AV devices plus X10 automation

- Graphical easy to follow setup
- Icons for favourite channels
- Personalised screen for different members of the family.
- Macro function; 1 press of a button can switch all devices to the correct setting.

Code EZICON

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Converts analogue Scart or Component into digital HDMI at a fixed 720P. Great for connecting legacy equipment to an HDMI switchbox for simplifying your connections.

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- Scart (RGB or composite)
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Outputs:

- HDMI output fixed 720p
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Code HDUS

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Keene IR Distribution Amplifier

- External receiver routes IR signals to internal wands
- Control all your equipment even when inside a cabinet
- Works with all popular remotes
- Complete system, easy to install and ready to use



Code IRBKITS

only £48.00

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Provides quick and easy 1:1 AV distribution via CAT5 cable. This active model gives excellent picture quality at up to 100m and also provides Infra Red control.

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- Includes IR control from receiver back to transmitter
- Active circuitry maintains signal quality up to 100m
- Simple to set up
- Robust reliable design - thousands in daily use. Euro models and passive models also available, please see website



Code C5QCA

only £99.99

GIGAVIDEO 800 Wireless HDMI Sender

At last, a cable free solution for HDMI. Any of the four HD inputs (2 x component and 2 x HDMI) can be sent wirelessly up to 20m to the receiver. The signal is uncompressed and remains up to and including 1080p. IR feedback gives you source control from the viewing area.

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- Mount the receiver (out of sight)
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- Sends the HD signal uncompressed



Code GV800

only £513.06

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Code KIRA

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Code KIRAM

Additional Module

£59.99



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|--|---------|---------------|
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| Premium range 1080p rated 10m length | HDHD10 | £49.99 |
| Premium range 1080p rated 15m length | HDHD15 | £59.99 |
| professional range 2160p rated 1m | HDHDC1 | £29.99 |
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HDMI cables – Adaptors

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| Mini Display Port to HDMI adaptor | MDPHDMI | £14.99 |
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Video Conversion

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|------------------------------|----------|----------------|
| Scart to HDMI (720p) | CS720PHD | £120.00 |
| Component to HDMI | CP280H | £115.00 |
| RGB to s-video | RGB2S | £69.99 |
| RGB to component | APT1 | £84.00 |
| Component to RGB | APT2 | £84.00 |
| Composite/s-video to VGA | AVT3300 | £45.00 |
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5.1 → VS Series
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1 2 3 4 5

Gorgeous-looking, hi-tech 5.1 system for serious cinema

Highs: Enormous sound; scintillating HF performance
Lows: Subwoofer feels underpowered compared to surrounds

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 2 x 400, 3 x 250W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 500W
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 173

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/623230



PIONEER
5.1 → EX Series
£11,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

A stunning 5.1 system to match the brand's high-quality components

Highs: Breathtaking accuracy; beautiful imagery and detail; sexy design and solid build
Lows: Demands specific room placement

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 160W,
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears (at a stretch...)

Tested: Issue 170

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/597086



CABASSE
5.1 → EOLE 2
£1,200 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Quirky-looking 5.1 sub/sat system

Highs: Design and build; flexible mounting; warm, involving voice
Lows: Slightly rough high frequencies; power handling disappoints; limited bass

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 70W,
4 x 100W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 169

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/591911



TEUFEL
5.1 → System 9
€4,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Potent THX Ultra2-system with industrial styling and build

Highs: Great bass extension; huge scale and accuracy; pleasing to look at, too
Lows: Stands or wall bracket fittings are extra; subwoofer is huuuuuge!

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 3 x 240W, 1 x 180W
Rears: Dipole
Subwoofer: 700W
Finish: Alu; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/502870



MISSION
5.1 → 79 Series
£2,400 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Floor-standing system with innovative side-firing bass drivers

Highs: Sophisticated and clean-sounding; excellent stereo imagery; easy on the eye
Lows: Not the most powerful or deepest bass in its class; won't go super-loud

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 200W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 300W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf:
Rears only

Tested: Issue 171

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/605119

Also Recommended...



JAMO
5.1 → A102 HCS 5
£330 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Good-value 5.1 system with living-room-friendly size/looks

Highs: Relaxed, intelligible dialogue presentation; available online for as little as £200
Lows: Subwoofer lacks real subterranean power; small satellites lend a rawness to the audio

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 5 x 60W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 200W
Finish: Cherry; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 170

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/597043



KEF
7.1 → Q Series
£2,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Classy-looking 7.1 set with a penchant for music and movies

Highs: Seamless integration from UniQ speakers; crystal clear high-end
Lows: Floorstanders need a lot of breathing space

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 4 x 130W,
2 x 100W, 1 x 150
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 250 RMS
Finish: Wood; Bookshelf: No

Tested: Issue 166

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/502987



MJ ACOUSTICS
5.1 → Xeno
£800 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

Stylish 5.1 sub/sat system with remarkable voice

Highs: Compact design; strong centre channel; feisty, versatile subwoofer
Lows: Lacks the scale of dispersion required for larger rooms

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 4 x 100W,
1 x 120W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 120W
Finish: Gloss; Bookshelf: Yes

Tested: Issue 161

For price check visit:

www.techradar.com/423010

Editor's Choice...

KEF
5.1 → XQ Series
£5,000 Approx

1 2 3 4 5

This KEF 5.1 array mixes standmount surrounds with two hulking floorstanders to deliver a massive cinematic audio

experience that's hard to fault – an ideal blend of deep bass, spacious mid-band and crystal clear treble. The design is gorgeous, too – another KEF masterclass in gloss black cabinets (curved to reduce internal reflections) and clearly taking a lead from the brand's awe-inspiring Reference system. Other variants of the speakers are available, so you can spec a more affordable, smaller-room setup should you wish.

Tested: Issue 174

For price check visit: www.techradar.com/629165

→ **Specifications**

Power handling: 2 x 200W, 2 x 120W, 1 x 150W
Rears: Direct radiating
Subwoofer: 1 x 200W
Finish: Gloss
Bookshelf: No chance



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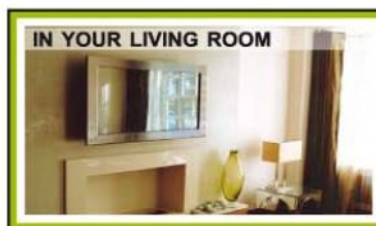
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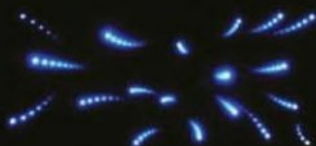
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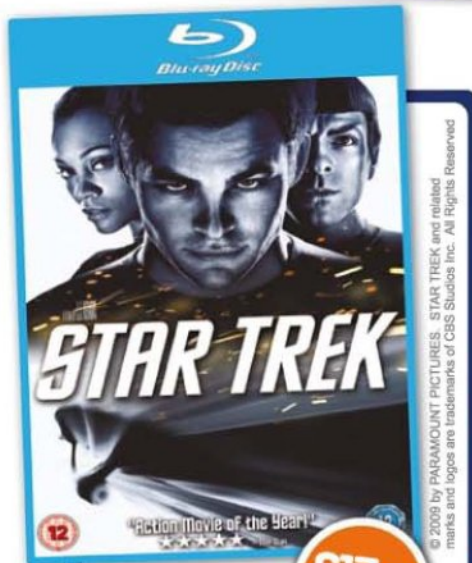
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